

# DA VINCI

## TAROT

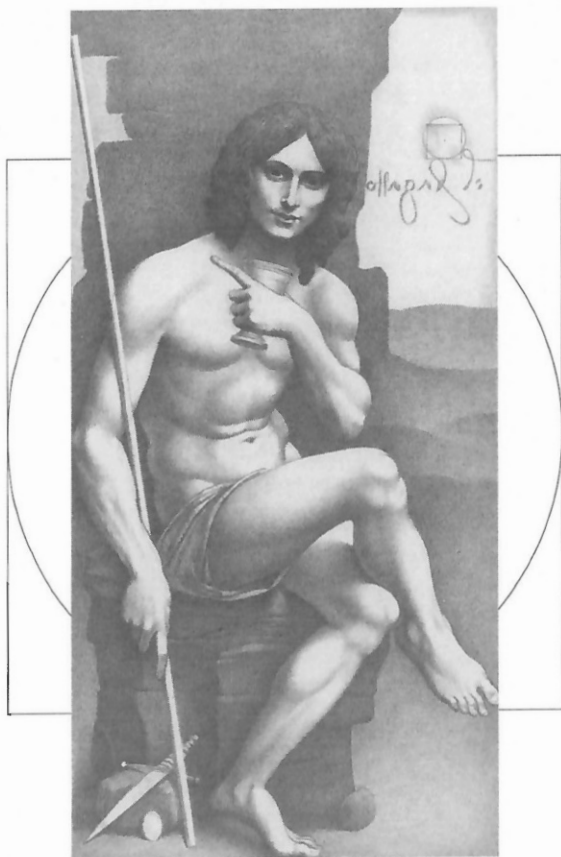
McElroy - Ghiuselev - Atanasov



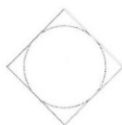




# DA VINCI TAROT



LO SCARABEO



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The author wishes to thank Riccardo Minetti  
and Robert Place for their assistance in identifying  
the sources for certain card illustrations,  
and Clyde, for simply being Clyde.

*Author's Dedication*

For Peyton, a modern-day Leonardo  
(especially with duct tape)



**DA VINCI TAROT**

Written by Mark McElroy

Cover Art by Iassen Ghiuselev

Artwork by Iassen Ghiuselev  
and A. Atanas Atanassov

Editing and graphics:  
Pietro Alligo, Valentina Bolatto

Lo Scarabeo S.r.l.  
Via Varese 15c 10152 - Torino - Italy  
[info@loscarabeo.com](mailto:info@loscarabeo.com) [www.loscarabeo.com](http://www.loscarabeo.com)

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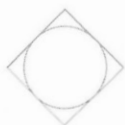
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## Chapter One:

# Rediscovering Leonardo da Vinci

### Da Vinci Mania

The publication of *The Da Vinci Code* and the release of the movie based on Dan Brown's novel have prompted an explosion of interest in the life and work of Leonardo da Vinci.

Just how popular is Da Vinci?

Amazon.com now lists more than 1000 books designed to help readers:

crack, discover, or debunk a "code" supposedly hidden in Da Vinci's artwork expose the mysteries associated with Da Vinci's supposed membership in a cult dedicated to pagan goddess worship think like Da Vinci and apply his genius to the challenges of daily life discover the "spiritual secrets" behind Da Vinci's insights, and explore Da Vinci's art, inventions, and notebooks in obsessive detail.

Online, a Google search on the phrase "Da Vinci Code" returns almost two million links. On television, Da Vinci appears as an advisor to Captain Kathryn Janeway (on *Star Trek: Voyager*) and serves as the inspiration for the mysterious Italian inventor, Rimbaldi (on *Alias*).

In Paris, it's difficult to find a tour company that *doesn't* offer a "Da Vinci walk" or a Da Vinci-flavored tour of the Louvre. Around the world, stores offer art prints, posters, photos, CDs, t-shirts, and key chains emblazoned with images of Da Vinci or his work.

There's even a *Da Vinci for Dummies*.

Almost five hundred years after his death, Da Vinci's genius as an artist, engineer,

inventor, and mathematician continue to inspire and challenge us. They have also inspired the creation of a remarkable deck of cards: *The Da Vinci Tarot*.

These cards may be used for a number of purposes – education, meditation, inspiration, and even divination. But in order to fully understand how they reflect and extend the work of Leonardo Da Vinci, it is necessary to look beyond hidden codes and secret societies and focus on the man himself.

### From Obscurity to Mastery

In 1452, in the tiny town of Vinci, Leonardo began life as the illegitimate son of a notary and a peasant girl. A move to nearby Florence gave the young man access to the finest education Renaissance Italy had to offer. In a culture that valued physical beauty, Da Vinci was fortunate to be a remarkably beautiful man... but in addition to his attractive features and fine physique, Leonardo also possessed an overwhelming array of gifts, including an ear for music, a fine singing voice, a persuasive and engaging demeanor, and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

Just fifteen years after his humble birth, Da Vinci was apprenticed to master artist Andrea del Verrocchio, who taught Botticelli and influenced Michelangelo. This appointment exposed him to the broadest possible range of projects, including the execution of paintings, metal work, and sculpture. Early signs of the apprentice's genius are apparent in one of del Verrocchio's most famous works, *The Baptism of Christ*. The face of the kneeling angel was completed by Da Vinci, and incorporates the subtle shading techniques associated with many of Da

Vinci's later masterpieces. By contrast, the figures of Jesus and John the Baptist (executed by del Verrocchio) look almost crude.

### The Distracted Genius

While Da Vinci's later masterpieces – including the *Mona Lisa* – would become internationally recognized icons, his career is also characterized by dozens of unfinished projects. After going into business for himself in 1478, Da Vinci failed to finish his first commissioned work. He likewise failed to complete the first of his larger paintings, *The Adoration of the Magi*, and the bleak *St. Jerome*.

Always an innovator, Da Vinci conceived new techniques, occasionally adopting and implementing them before they were proven. Many people recognize Da Vinci's *Last Supper* on sight; few, however, know the painting was executed using an experimental technique that involved applying oil-based paint to a thin wall of dried plaster.

The experiment failed; just seventy years after its completion, the masterpiece was almost unrecognizable. Early attempts to restore it, dating to the 1700's, all but obliterated the original work; had modern technology not been brought to bear on the restoration process, *The Last Supper* would likely have been lost to decay and neglect.

Da Vinci's notebooks provide another window on the scope of his genius – and his apparent preference for creation over completion. In addition to detailed studies of human anatomy, the notebooks contain detailed sketches for hundreds of inventions, from flying machines to advanced weaponry. Many of these visions outstripped the technology of his days and were, therefore, impossible to produce. Others, however, were apparently envisioned – and then abandoned. Apparently, Da Vinci was so intent on invention that

often he lacked the time (or the inclination) for execution.

### The Milan Years

In the early 1480's Da Vinci approached Ludovico Sforza, the duke of Milan, with an intriguing proposal. In an extraordinary letter to the duke, Da Vinci claimed to possess insight into advanced technologies for the production of bombs, catapults, warships, and tanks. The duke responded by appointing Da Vinci as his personal engineer and architect; he further ordered the production of commemorative statuary, portraits, and festival plans.

This eighteen-year appointment would prove to be one of the most active and productive in Leonardo's life. He took full advantage of the opportunity, studying human physiology, plant biology, advanced math, and even physics. Sketches from the period include plans for everything from churches to submarines.

### Connections to the Esoteric?

Popular interest in the so-called Da Vinci Code has made much of Leonardo's supposed connections to forbidden sects and secret societies. One novel goes so far as to position Da Vinci as a "Grand Master" of a cult of goddess worship! In truth, little or no credible evidence links Da Vinci to such organizations.

That said, during his employment by the Sforza family, Da Vinci would have almost certainly been exposed to at least one innovation frequently considered to incorporate esoteric content: the Tarot.

These early decks – the oldest known examples of what would come to be called Tarot – were commissioned or acquired by the Sforza family at great expense. What made the decks distinctive from ordinary playing cards – apart from their monetary value – was the addition of a fifth suit: a series of twenty-one trumps, plus a special card called "The Fool".

Several of these decks survive; all are incomplete. (A beautiful reproduction and restoration of one of these decks, published as *The Visconti Tarot*, is available from Lo Scarabeo.)

It is tempting to imagine the Sforza family using these cards to tell fortunes and divine the future. Once again, however, the most reliable evidence indicates the cards were likely used to play a trick-taking game very much like modern Bridge. Pin-holes in some surviving cards also suggest the decks may have been tacked to a wall or board and displayed as objects of art.

### Da Vinci and the Tarot

Did Leonardo Da Vinci encounter the Tarot while working for the Sforza family? No one knows. It is intriguing, though, to imagine his reaction to the cards... and to envision the sort of deck Da Vinci, a Renaissance Master, might have produced.

The deck in your hands represents an effort by scholars and highly-skilled artists to reinterpret Tarot in terms of Da Vinci's art and inventions. Rather than position itself as "the Tarot Da Vinci would have invented", *The Da Vinci Tarot* aligns selected elements from the Master's work with the archetypes, themes, and

divinatory meanings associated with modern Tarot.

The result is a work of art in its own right: an exhibit celebrating the enormous scope of Da Vinci's work... yet compact enough to fit into a pocket or purse! In keeping with the earliest Tarot traditions, this deck is perfectly well-suited for playing a rousing game of tarocchi. (Instructions, both detailed and simplified, are widely available on the Internet.) They also lend themselves to a number of other applications, from meditation to divination.

Our goal in producing the deck has been to encourage and enhance your personal rediscovery of Da Vinci's genius... and, at the same time, to create a deck of Tarot cards simple enough for beginners to use, yet complex enough to reward in-depth study.

In order to make the most of this deck, it will be helpful to learn more about Tarot in general: the origin of the cards, their structure and organization, the themes and meanings that have been associated with them over the years, and the purposes the cards can serve. This practical knowledge – a basic familiarity with where Tarot has been and where Tarot is going – will also clarify the value of the distinctive features found only in *The Da Vinci Tarot*.



## Chapter Two:

# Creating the Da Vinci Tarot

### The Majors-Only Deck

The cards in most Tarot decks are grouped into two major divisions: the twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana and the fifty-six cards of the Minor Arcana.

In 1992, the artist Iassen Ghiuselev, under the direction of Giordano Berti, was commissioned to create a series of twenty-two images: the Major Arcana of the *Da Vinci Tarot*. These cards met with great acclaim. Marco Bussagli, an art historian of some renown, wrote:

“[Iassen Ghiuselev] has completely succeeded in restoring the charm of Leonardesque chiaroscuro [a shading technique producing realistic textures through the use of light a shadow]... The Leonardo Tarot is worthy of admiration. It is not simply an academic exercise, but something more, almost as if the works by the genius Da Vinci are able to reveal here their most intimate nature, that of the Arcana of the intellect and the spirit.”

Both as an art deck and an oracle, the original “Majors only” deck was a success. In addition to the stunning artwork, the *Da Vinci Tarot* incorporated a number of intriguing elements. In the background of each illustration, the title of the card appeared in Da Vinci’s distinctive mirror-script. Each card also featured a tiny icon, or glyph, adapted from the Master’s sketches and designs, that hinted at the divinatory meanings and themes associated with the card.

### The Demand for a Full Deck

During the past few years, the skyrocketing popularity of Tarot has created an increasing demand for high-quality decks.

Tarot websites – especially those featuring reviews, such as TarotPassages.com and Aeclectic.net – publish sophisticated, in-depth articles evaluating both the beauty and the utility of hundreds of decks.

Unlike their occultist forerunners (some of whom ignored the Minor Arcana, and used only the Majors for divination), modern audiences tend to favor decks with a full seventy-eight cards. Given the visual and intellectual appeal of the Da Vinci Majors, expanding the deck to incorporate seventy-eight cards made perfect sense.

### The Logistics of Expansion

The challenges of such an expansion may not, at first, be apparent. Aligning twenty-two of Da Vinci’s works with the energies of the Major Arcana had been challenging enough; now, the team would have to find and identify fifty-six additional works which could be adapted to reflect the traditional meanings of the Minor cards.

Ten years had passed since the creation of the first deck, and Iassen Ghiuselev was no longer available. A new artist – someone capable of replicating Ghiuselev’s use of subtle shading techniques – would have to be recruited to complete the Minors. In addition, in order to create a deck that would feel unified and complete, the new artist would have to be willing and able to preserve the coherency of style, line, and color that was the hallmark of the existing Major Arcana.

Further complicating the process, the source material – the images on which the card illustrations would be based – was the work of Leonardo da Vinci. Da Vinci’s paintings, drawings, and diagrams com-

prise some of the most recognized artwork on the planet. Given the genius (and familiarity) of the originals, it would be all too easy to produce work that would strike the viewer as plagiarized or derivative.

Eventually, Bulgarian artist Atanas Atanassov was selected to complete the deck. Atanassov's work very effectively preserves the distinctive style, tone, and vision of the Majors; the fact that the Major and Minor Arcana appeal "made for each other" is a testimony to his formidable talent.

Students of art history know Da Vinci completed very few paintings; as a result, the vast number of illustrations in the *Da Vinci Tarot* – particularly the Minors – had to be based on material from Da Vinci's sketchbooks. These drawings are often quite small and extremely rough; some are barely more than vague sets of lines and geometric figures executed as motion studies. Atanassov proved remarkably adept at "fleshing out" these images, adapting them to Tarot themes and lending them visual depth and texture... while also preserving their familiarity!

### **Beyond the Seventy-Eight Card Deck**

When the full deck appeared in 2002, it was also warmly received. The booklet included with the cards was a slim, but valuable, companion piece, featuring Giordano Berti's short history of the deck, instructions for its use as a divinatory tool, and brief divinatory meanings written by Rodrigo Tebani.

Those who felt drawn to the deck, however, wanted still more. Leonardo's tendency to feminize masculine figures (an approach preserved by Ghiuselev and Atanassov) led to questions about identity (and the gender!) of characters in card illustrations. People were curious, too, about the source material: which paintings or sketches had been adapted for use on each card... and why?

About the same time, an explosion of interest in Leonardo Da Vinci's work (and the possibility that his paintings conceal a coded message) occurred. The popular novel by author Dan Brown was capturing the imagination of millions... all of whom had new questions about Da Vinci's work, its messages, and possible connections to the Tarot.

With an eye toward honoring the requests of "old friends" in the Tarot community and providing an engaging introduction to "new friends" who were curious about Tarot, Lo Scarabeo elected to create an expanded kit, including this detailed companion guide. With this goal in mind, Mark McElroy (author of *Taking the Tarot to Heart* and *What's in the Cards for You?* and designer of the *Bright Idea Deck*) was commissioned to create an approachable guidebook. –

### **The Finished Product**

Da Vinci invested a lifetime in his work. More than a decade of additional effort has gone into making the *Da Vinci Tarot* – a distillation and adaptation of the Master's work – a practical, appealing deck suitable for both study and consultation.

In order to fully appreciate the power and potential of the *Da Vinci Tarot*, it may first be necessary to learn more about the Tarot in general. With an eye toward this goal, the next chapter provides a brief overview of Tarot, from its surprising origins in northern Italy to its present-day utility as a creative and spiritual tool.

Later chapters supply complete instructions for caring for and working with the deck. Entire volumes could be (and have been) written on these subjects; it is the goal of this guidebook to provide you with a sound foundation for continued study.

Finally, the card commentaries provided



in the last chapter provide insights into the artwork chosen for (and the divinatory meanings associated with) each card. Advanced students of the Tarot will notice the divinatory meanings offered here include a degree of departure from tradition; this has been done to freshen the deck's perspective and to bring its associ-

ated meanings into better alignment with the images on the cards.

*The Da Vinci Tarot* will reward study and reflection. We sincerely hope this guidebook will make the deck more approachable for beginners... and more valuable for users at every level of sophistication.



## Chapter Three:

# The Tarot, Then and Now

### Where Do Tarot Cards Come From?

Purchase a dozen Tarot books, and you will likely find a dozen different stories about the origins of Tarot cards. Among them:

Buried beneath the Great Pyramid is a sealed chamber where Egyptian holy men inducted selected students into the priesthood. On the walls were twenty-two golden plates, each one teaching a single, sacred truth. These same images are found on Tarot cards today.

When ancient scholars feared the world's secret wisdom would be lost, they met in the city of Fez and encoded their magical secrets in a series of twenty-two pictures. To guarantee the survival of their secrets, they made these images into a popular game. Common people passed the game along, completely unaware of the deck's hidden messages. These cards, of course, were Tarot cards.

Before the ancient continent of Lemuria sank into the sea, its wise men fabricated a crystal globe. One half of the globe was decorated with the sixty-four symbols of the I Ching; etched into the other half were the twenty-two most important cards of the Tarot. When disaster struck, the globe came apart. The half containing the I Ching symbols wound up in China, and the half depicting the images on Tarot cards appeared in Europe.

To these tales, inspired by the themes of recent books and movies, we might add:

Christian Cabalists, Rosicrucians, Freemasons, and the Knights Templar, seeking to hide the secret that Jesus fathered children with Mary Magdalene,

developed the Tarot as a picturebook of suppressed doctrines. Da Vinci and other initiates into the secret tradition would instantly recognize the deck's dual purpose: perpetuating an awareness of the Sacred Feminine and concealing the existence of a forgotten, holy bloodline.

Does any evidence exist to support these fanciful tales?

### The Secret Origins of the Tarot

In truth, the evolution of the Tarot deck has been fairly well documented. The best evidence suggests that Tarot began as a trick-taking game – similar to modern Bridge – in the early years of the fifteenth century.

Playing cards – the forerunners of the fifty-two-card decks still in use today – came first, having been imported from Islamic countries. The first Tarot decks were based on these, but added twenty-one trump cards, plus a special card called The Fool.

The distinctive illustrations on trump cards strike modern viewers as mysterious, but to the Renaissance Italians who played games with them, the stories and themes associated with the cards were very well known. The fact that early decks feature unnumbered trumps may suggest that the stories were so well known, the game designers thought anyone should be able, simply by looking, to know which card could “trump” the others.

The first, or original, Tarot deck (if, indeed, a single deck ever existed) has been lost to time. As Tarot grew in popularity, the number of decks increased. In these early decks, the structure, order, and

illustrations found on the trumps vary from pack to pack. The result? No one really knows exactly what the "original" deck looked like, what order its trumps were in, or why its creator (or creators) chose to illustrate certain trumps with certain images.

With time, the more bizarre stories about the Tarot's origin would prove so appealing, the mundane truth would be all but forgotten. In this way, Tarot's humble beginnings – a card game, likely designed as an amusement for royalty – would, in fact, become the real "secret history" of the deck.

### **An Early Deck: The Visconti-Sforza Tarot**

One of the earliest references to Tarot comes from a letter, written in 1450, by Francesco Sforza. Francesco was the father of Ludovico Sforza, who would later become Leonardo da Vinci's employer and patron during some of the Master's most productive years.

In the note, the Duke asks his treasurer to send him the most beautiful pack of "triumphs" (one of the first terms associated with the Tarot deck) available. Later, the Sforza family name would later be associated with an entire family of early Tarot packs, often referred to as the Visconti-Sforza Tarots. Fragmentary copies of several decks exist; the most complete is a hand-painted deck of seventy-four cards (the Devil, the Tower, the Three of Swords, and the Knight of Pentacles are missing).

These elaborate cards were works of art, incorporating gold leaf backgrounds and highly detailed images. As Tarot artist and historian Robert Place points out in his excellent book, *The Tarot: History, Symbolism, and Divination*, these cards were likely never used as gaming tools, as they are both too thick and too elaborate for easy shuffling and dealing. At one

point, they may have been displayed as works of art (as pin-holes in the top of some cards attest). A beautiful recreation of the Visconti-Sforza is available from Lo Scarabeo.

The subjects portrayed on the trump cards in the Visconti-Sforza are straightforward. We see the Fool – a beggar, the lowliest human station (from a Renaissance point of view). We see a common street performer. We see an Emperor, an Empress, and a Pope. Other cards depict themes popular with Renaissance artists: virtues (Strength, Love) and figures from Christian Scripture (the Devil, the Last Judgment).

While some assert that even these cards include veiled references to esoteric or occult content, the cards have a decidedly Christian flavor – hardly surprising, considering where and when they evolved. Given that Tarot decks were often specifically exempted from Church restrictions on playing cards, it's extremely unlikely that the illustrations contained any secrets the Church sought to suppress.

### **The Contributions of the Occultists**

Given that the Tarot deck was created as a game, we might well ask why anyone would assign special significance to the cards. Why should anyone consider using a card game as tool for divination, meditation, fortune telling, or spiritual guidance?

The first people to assert that Tarot cards have legitimate uses beyond gaming are commonly referred to as *occultists*. Today, the word *occult* has many unpleasant connotations, including an association with demonic forces. In fact, the word has a very simple, mundane definition: it means *hidden*.

Occult knowledge, then, is any hidden, forbidden, or secret knowledge. The term has little relevance today, since almost all

the information once considered occult – or well hidden – is widely published and available to anyone with access to the Internet!

The occultists, as a general rule, were consumed with two pastimes:

- 1) discovering (or, occasionally, simply inventing) the secret information they believed to be hidden in various resources, and
- 2) creating and cataloging connections between the various occult information systems – between Cabala, for example, and astrology.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Antoine Court de Gebelin was the first to write that the cards were the “work of the ancient Egyptians... the only remnant of their magnificent libraries”. He also associated the twenty-one trumps and The Fool with letters of the “Egyptian alphabet” – a fanciful association at best, given that the so-called “Egyptian alphabet” he worked with owed more to his imagination than to actual scholarship.

He was soon followed by Jean-Baptiste Alliette, writing as Etteilla. Etteilla added to the fanciful notion of Egyptian origins for the cards. More importantly, however, Etteilla forged the first connections between Tarot cards and astrology. He is widely considered the founder of the practice of telling fortunes with the cards. (Gypsies, often incorrectly credited with distributing Tarot cards through Europe, actually told fortunes with standard playing cards until their customers began asking why the Gypsies didn’t use Tarot decks instead!)

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, an occultist named Alphonse-Louis Constant, writing as Eliphas Levi, would characterize the Tarot as “the most perfect instrument of divina-

tion”. Further, as he forged more and more associations between Tarot cards and various systems of belief and magic, he would assert, “An imprisoned person, with no other book than the Tarot, if he knew how to use it, could in a few years acquire universal knowledge”.

With each generation, the occultist passion for assigning mythical, magical, and mystical information to the cards grew in its intensity. In the late 1880’s, a British occult society, The Golden Dawn, as part of their exploration of common themes among the world’s mythical, magical, and spiritual traditions, would map a comprehensive system of correspondences and associations onto each card of the Tarot.

The contribution of the occultists, then, is the association of Tarot with an astonishing array of astrological, magical, spiritual, and mystical insights. The correspondences the occultists “discovered” were, to some extent, sometimes projected onto the cards; some were also, without a doubt, pure fabrications. In the end, though, the efforts of the occultists are directly responsible for the Tarot evolving from a game into a comprehensive and powerful system for generating insights and spiritual guidance.

### **The Tarot Today**

Today, in our culturally and historically illiterate society, the symbols, images, and myths so familiar to the Renaissance Christians and the occultists have largely been forgotten. Hollywood, not history, informs the average person’s knowledge of Tarot. As a result, modern audiences, when confronted with Tarot cards, frequently respond with ignorance and fear. Many believe the deck to be, at best, a con artist’s prop... and, at worst, a tool of the Devil.

That said, a trend toward personal spirituality is leading many people to explore everything from Eastern religions to for-

gotten elements of the Western tradition. The Tarot is, happily, among a number of increasingly popular tools being chosen for their ability to generate balance and insight.

Tarot decks were once quite rare; now, there are thousands of decks on the market, reflecting a broad variety of interests. Some decks are rich with symbolic content. Some are fluffier and friendlier. Some feature animals; others feature cartoon characters. Some are spooky, with frightening or even erotic images; others are based on fairy tales and children's stories. A large bookstore may carry two dozen different decks; a good metaphysical store may carry many, many more.

As Tarot becomes more and more mainstreamed, its applications go well beyond fortune-telling. Instead of asking, "When will my Prince come sweep me off my feet?" modern Tarot users are:

*Collecting decks.* Few collector's items vary more in their beauty and variety – and even handmade decks are within the budgets of most collectors. Online auction sites like Ebay list hundreds of decks for sale (do some research, though, before paying a premium price for any deck an Ebay listing describes as rare!).

*Meditating with the cards.* Many decks feature images rich in symbolism. Others contain cards with amazing depth, designed to reward careful study. Still others are simply beautiful! Many people now enjoy using these cards as meditation aids, as contemplating them (and their message) promotes a pleasant, focused state of mind.

*Gaining personal insight.* Users enjoy focusing on an issue, situation, or problem, and then drawing a card as a means of enhancing their perspective. The process forces the user to see his or her situation from an entirely different

angle... and, as a result, provides startling new insights in very little time.

*Brainstorming.* Fortune tellers draw cards and ask, "What's the answer?" Brainstormers draw cards and ask, "How many answers can I come up with, based on the symbols and images on this card?" The idea is to generate as many options for action as possible in the shortest amount of time. The more "out there" the idea, the better... because unusual associations often produce the most creative solutions. Entire decks, such as the *Bright Idea Deck*, have been specifically created as brainstorming tools.

*Writing and journaling.* Keeping a daily journal or blog requires an enormous amount of creativity. Writers, journalists, and bloggers are drawing a "card of the day" and using it as a writing prompt. The result? They're writing about topics and tapping into memories they would otherwise overlook entirely.

*Practicing their art.* Photographers draw inspiration for photo series by drawing a single card. Painters recreate favorite cards as a means of practicing technique and exploring new ideas. Collage artists and digital artists create their own decks as an exercise in artistic expression.

*Enhancing their therapy.* In addition to seeking out traditional therapy, many Tarot users find that working with the cards helps them to identify issues which are causing them pain or difficulty... and to come up with strategies for healing.

The Da Vinci Tarot can be used for any or all of these purposes. In addition to incorporating some of the most striking and enduring images of all time, this deck is designed to be a flexible and powerful tool for personal insight. With the cards and this companion guide in hand, you have everything you need to begin your own exploration of the Tarot.

## Chapter Four:

# The Da Vinci Tarot Deck - Content and Concepts

### What Makes a Deck a Tarot Deck?

Since the Tarot's invention, the suits in the deck, the number of cards in the deck, the order of those cards, and the numbers and titles assigned to each card have varied from deck to deck.

In the 1800's, occultists began assigning divinatory meanings to each card. These meanings varied from expert to expert, depending on the system he or she favored. Some of these meanings proved popular and were widely adopted; others have been rejected or changed.

These trends continue today, as artist and deck publishers continue to reinterpret the Tarot. As a result, no definitive Tarot deck exists, and no one book (despite the often-inflated claims made by some authors!) contains a definitive list of meanings for the cards.

That said: most Tarot decks for sale today (including the *Da Vinci Tarot*) follow this general pattern: seventy-eight cards per deck, with twenty-one trumps, forty pips, sixteen court cards, and one special card, usually called the Fool. Deck designers usually assign very specific meanings to each card. While you should give these meanings consideration, you are always free to embrace them, to continue to use meanings you've already learned, or to develop your own.

### The Major Arcana

In the *Da Vinci Tarot*, the twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana (or, more simply, "the Majors") include twenty-one trumps, plus The Fool. These may be considered the most important cards in the deck; when they appear in a reading, they deserve special consideration and emphasis.

Generally, the Major Arcana represent powerful themes: the spiritual or psychological forces that shape our lives. At the very least, they symbolize early influences, motivations, fears, hopes, dreams, goals, beliefs, and ethical systems. Some users believe these cards also represent ways that the Universal Will (or God, or the Goddess, or your Higher Self) is influencing the events of your life as part of a personal program of evolution and transformation.

In the *Da Vinci Tarot*, the Major Arcana cards are assigned the following numbers and titles:

- I - Magician
- II - High Priestess
- III - Empress
- IV - Emperor
- V - Hierophant
- VI - Lovers
- VII - Chariot
- VIII - Justice
- IX - Hermit
- X - Wheel
- XI - Strength
- XII - Hanged Man
- XIII - Death
- XIV - Temperance
- XV - Devil
- XVI - Tower
- XVII - Star
- XVIII - Moon
- XIX - Sun
- XX - Judgement
- XXI - World
- XXII or 0 - Fool

The Major Arcana of the *Da Vinci Tarot* tell a deeply personal story: the pursuit of spiritual transformation.

The story begins with Trump 0 - The Fool. In many other decks, the Fool is portrayed as a carefree young man who walks along the edge of a chasm. He carries few, if any, belongings. He is enthusiastic, but inexperienced. Any wisdom he possesses from previous lives has been repressed; he is starting his journey with a clean slate

The *Da Vinci Tarot* Fool breaks with this tradition. Instead of the young man, we see one of Da Vinci's most inspiring and beloved inventions: a flying machine. The figure suspended between the bat-like wings is you.

Before soaring to new heights, you have decisions to make. Will your fears keep you grounded... or will your curiosity and bravery motivate you to take a leap of faith? The first option is certainly safer, but the latter holds more potential to alter your perspective.

Like the Fool, each of the Major Arcana cards represents a force you must deal with, a lesson you must learn, or a realization you must have in order to become your best possible self. By studying these cards, by reading about their meaning in this guide, and by considering what message they may hold for you, you experience the Fool's Journey for yourself.

With time, both you and the Fool will reach the end of the sequence, a card called The World. There, you'll have the opportunity to achieve a final, important insight. Once you do, you may discover a secret, hinted at by the special number assigned to the Fool: when one cycle ends, another always begins.

### **The Minor Arcana**

In the *Da Vinci Tarot*, the Minor Arcana consists of fifty-six cards. These, in turn, are broken down into four suits, each of which incorporates fourteen cards. The suits are:

Chalices (also called Cups)  
Pentacles (also called Coins)  
Swords  
Wands

Each suit represents a very specific area of emphasis - one of four "perspectives" you can use when exploring a question or situation:

*Chalices - Emotion, Spirituality, and Reflection.* This suit is concerned with your innermost feelings, your fears and motivations, and your intuition. The suit of Chalices corresponds to the ancient element of Water, which is associated with passivity, reflection, psychology, and spiritual potential.

*Pentacles - Finance, Sensuality, and Physicality.* This suit emphasizes your physical world: your environment, your belongings and acquisitions, your money, and your body. The suit of Pentacles corresponds to the ancient element of Earth, which is associated with growth, sexuality, fertility, nurturing, and practical, down-to-earth considerations of any kind.

*Swords - Intellect, Logic, and Communication.* This suit focuses on the intellectual world, exploring your decision-making ability, your facility with logic, and your ability to express yourself well to others. The suit of Swords corresponds to the ancient element of Air, which is associated with movement, direction, and communication.

*Wands - Intention, Inspiration, and Action.* This suit examines your struggle to achieve your goals, your desire to make your mark in the world around you, and the methods you and others choose when pursuing success. The suit of Wands corresponds to the ancient element of Fire, which is associated with activity, aggression, and creativity.



## The Pips

Within each suit are a series of cards numbered from Ace to Ten, referred to as the pips.

In older decks, including the Visconti-Sforza deck commissioned by Francesco Sforza, the pips were *unillustrated*: that is, they lacked detailed images like those found on the Major Arcana cards. On the Ace of Chalice, you would see, perhaps, a single chalice, or cup; on the Three of Pentacles, you would see an arrangement of three pentacles or coins; and so on.

As Tarot decks became more popular, *illustrated pips* – cards with illustrations designed to help users recall the meanings assigned to them – came into fashion. In a deck with illustrated pips, instead of seeing three coins on the Three of Pentacles, you might see a craftsman consulting with his patrons, an artist evaluating his work, or, as in the *Da Vinci Tarot*, three laborers working together toward a common goal.

## The Court Cards

Each suit also contains four court cards (also called “people cards” or “approach cards”). In the *Da Vinci Tarot*, these cards are called the Knave, Knight, Queen, and King.

When exploring the meaning of a court card, you have many options. Traditionally, the court cards have represented specific people with specific traits and genders. The Knave of Swords, for example, was once said to represent a young man with dark hair, fair skin, and blue eyes.

The problems inherent in this system are obvious to any modern audience: because three of the four court cards are male, court cards would refer to men far more often than they would to women. Because the members of the court are frequently drawn as Caucasians, the traditional

deck’s ability to refer to people of other ethnic backgrounds was extremely limited.

Today, it’s far more likely that court cards will be interpreted in terms of their demeanor or approach:

Knives have just begun their service to a Knight. They are inexperienced, and they often have fanciful and impractical ideas. While enthusiastic, their abilities are limited and their talents are unproven.

Knights work in service to the King. They represent decisive action. As they fulfill their mission, they may exercise their power in positive or negative ways.

Queens provide insight and intuition. They have authority and power, but they tend to exercise that power in passive or indirect ways. Instead of taking charge outright, they prefer to exert subtle influence.

Kings are concerned with direction, control, and the maintenance of the balance of power. They have absolute authority, and their word is law.

This approach provides far more flexibility in interpretation and application, especially in modern times. In the *Da Vinci Tarot*, Knives are drawn as males... but both men and women can be enthusiastic and inexperienced. Queens are female... but both men and women can possess intuitive insight or exercise subtle influence.

For quick insight into the meaning of a court card, combine the qualities represented by its suit with the approach associated with the card’s rank. For example:

The Knave of Pentacles may suggest that your enthusiasm (Knives) for making money (Pentacles) outstrips your ability to do so.

The Queen of Chalices may prompt you to seek spiritual or emotional (Chalices) insights (Queens).

The Knight of Swords may suggest that you're charging forward (Knights) without thinking (Swords) through your options first.

The King of Wands could indicate a need to control (Kings) your ambition (Wands).

### A Note about Card Meanings

Guided by tradition, intuition, and personal insight, the creators of the *Da Vinci Tarot* have assigned keywords and divinatory meanings to the cards in this deck. For this guidebook, these meanings have been expanded to incorporate ideas about the actions cards might encourage and discourage. We have also provided an extended commentary and exploration

questions designed to help you experience the cards and their meanings as fully as possible.

When you first begin working with the deck, you may frequently find yourself looking up card meanings in this guidebook. Remember, though: each card features an illustration (adapted from Da Vinci's work) specifically chosen for its ability to suggest the meanings we've assigned. As you work with the *Da Vinci Tarot* you'll eventually learn to "pull" meanings from the image without referring to the book.

Eventually, as your insight matures, the cards will take on meanings beyond those suggested here. Remember: the meanings recorded in this guide are suggestions, not prescriptions. You should always feel free to embrace whatever message the *Da Vinci Tarot* has for you.



## Chapter Five:

# Working with the Cards

### Caring for Your Cards

Many books on Tarot prescribe very specific rituals for blessing, cleansing, storing, and caring for decks. Typical suggestions include:

Smudging the deck with tobacco smoke or incense prior to use.

Leaving the cards fanned out or spread out on a table for one day prior to use.

Placing the cards on a windowsill on a moonlit night, allowing the moonlight to shine on them for as long as possible.

Praying or saying an invocation as a means of “activating” the cards.

Keeping the cards wrapped in a silk bag, or storing them in a wooden box.

Placing a stone or crystal on the deck after use to absorb negative thoughts or energy.

That said, many highly experienced and effective Tarot readers do none of these things. If these rituals give you joy, or if they enhance your appreciation or reverence for the deck, by all means adopt them. If they discourage you from working with the cards, or if such rituals simply aren't for you, feel free to disregard them.

### Consulting the Tarot

Consulting the Tarot consists of preparing for a reading, choosing a spread, shuffling and cutting the cards, and interpreting the results. For beginners, reading the cards can be a daunting practice, but with just a little time and effort, you will quickly be able to relate card images and meanings to the question at hand.

Many people balk at reading the cards for themselves, and many Tarot books warn that doing so is unwise. Reading your own cards does require a measure of objectivity and practice. It's also very easy for beginners to project their own hopes and fears onto the cards. However, if you are willing to be patient and you can remain level-headed, there's no reason why you should hesitate to consult the Tarot on your own behalf.

You should, of course, be very comfortable with the cards before you attempt to read for other people.

### Preparing for a Reading

*Performing an Opening Ritual.* Before you attempt to work with the Tarot, you may find it useful to engage in a brief ritual. The purpose of a ritual is to calm you, to quiet your thoughts, and to send a message to your body and mind that you are about to engage in important work.

Rituals don't have to be formal or complex in order to be effective. For some people, three deep breaths do the trick; others prefer to light candles, listen to music, or burn incense. Others pause for a moment of silent prayer. Some people, however, prefer more complex and formal practices designed to shield them (and their cards) from negative influences: centering, casting circles, and invoking deities, angels, or guardian spirits.

Whatever your personal preference for rituals, it may best to choose one and stick with it. With each repetition of the ritual, your body learns to associate a series of actions with the achievement of a peaceful and receptive state of mind. This conditioning can prove extremely useful,

allowing you to move quickly from distraction to total concentration in the space of a few breaths.

The use of a ritual is strictly optional; if rituals aren't for you, you can begin your session by defining your question.

*Defining Your Question.* Though it is perhaps the most often overlooked step in consulting the Tarot, defining your question is absolutely critical to effective divination. If you approach the Tarot with vague questions, you will receive vague answers. There is no more certain formula for frustration.

You may find these guidelines useful when composing your question:

Deal with one issue at a time. Rather than ask, "What can I do to make Terry notice me and when is the right time to do it?" choose the more important of these two questions and ask it first. You can then perform an additional reading for any additional questions.

Be specific. A question like "What should I do?" may generate very broad advice. Asking "What should I do about that annoying woman at work who keeps playing her music so loud?" can yield very specific advice that can change your situation for the better.

Focus on yourself. Too many beginners expect to use the Tarot as a sort of meta-physical stalking device, asking questions like, "What does Shaun really think about me?" You'll be more empowered if you ask first-person questions: What do I think about Shaun? Why does it matter to me what Shaun thinks? How can I make sure I make the right impression on Shaun?

Try starting with What and How. Why and when questions are popular, but they can also waste a great deal of your time.

Exploring *why* you tend to procrastinate, for example, may turn out to be just another way to procrastinate! Asking *when* your soulmate will appear positions you as the victim of fate, waiting for a tick of the cosmic clock to transform your life. By contrast, questions that begin with What or How will help you identify very specific things you need to consider or do. What and How questions prepare you for action and encourage personal responsibility. As a result, they tend to produce more satisfying answers than Why or When questions.

When you've defined your question, write it down. Once you see the cards, you'll be tempted to revise your question, and you may do so without even realizing it. Writing down the question forces you to be specific... and prevents you from drifting off the subject as you analyze the cards.

### Choosing a Spread

While a single-card draw can be enlightening, spreads – specialized layouts of cards, with meanings assigned to each position in the layout – make it possible for the Tarot to supply you with very specific, very focused insights.

As with rituals, spreads do not have to be complex in order to be effective. One of the most simple spreads known is the Past-Present-Future spread: three cards in a straight line. The leftmost card reveals the past, the middle card represents the present, and the card on the right provides insight into the future.

Another simple spread is the Yes/No spread. When asking a Yes or No question, draw two cards. The first card represents the answer "Yes" and the reasons why Yes would be a good answer. The second card, "No", explains the benefits of saying "No". With this kind of information in hand, you can make much wiser yes-or-no decisions.

Often, the nature of your question will suggest a layout. To answer the question, "Should I stay or should I go?" you might draw two cards (or two lines of cards) that represent reasons for staying and going. If your question is "What three things do I need to do to boost my business?" you might draw three cards and arrange them in the shape of stairs going up, suggesting three steps to success.

The creators of the *Da Vinci Tarot* have developed two spreads specifically for use with this deck. These two spreads, the Pentacle Spread and *Da Vinci's Insight and Inspiration* spread, appear at the end of this chapter.

### **Shuffling, Cutting, and Dealing the Cards**

Though the specific formula will differ from book to book and teacher to teacher, traditionally, Tarot cards are shuffled and cut in very specific ways:

A gentle, overhand shuffle (lifting cards from the back of the deck and "sowing" them into the remainder of the pack) will protect your cards from being crimped, bent, or excessively worn.

After shuffling, the deck is often cut into three piles, signifying "body, mind, and spirit", "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit", or "Maiden, Mother, Crone".

When the three piles are reassembled into one deck, shuffling is done with the left hand (the hand of intuition), and cards are dealt face-down.

These traditional methods are very dramatic, and they add a touch of reverence and special care to your work with the cards.

They are, however, only traditions. *Da Vinci*, as an inventor, constantly sought alternatives to convention – even when others scoffed at his methods.

In keeping with the spirit of Leonardo and this deck, you should feel free to explore new ways of working with the cards and adopt the ones that are comfortable and effective for you. If you prefer to riffle the cards (giving them a standard "over the bridge" or poker shuffle), cut them just once, use your right hand, and deal cards face up... you should do so.

Be prepared, though: for some people, rituals are very important. Very dogmatic students of Tarot may express shock or disapproval when traditions are ignored. Before reading for or with someone else, discussing the emphasis your partner or client places on tradition can be a good idea.

### **Interpreting the Reading**

Beginners, eager to "get it right", are apt to consult a guidebook as soon as cards hit the table. This has the unfortunate effect of allowing linear/logical thinking to squash imaginative and intuitive thinking. You may find the following method to be a preferable – and more effective – alternative.

Begin by looking at the cards: let your eyes wander over the images. The illustrations developed for the *Da Vinci Tarot* are particularly beautiful; take time to appreciate the subtle shading, the shape of the composition, and the fine details. What are the figures looking at? Where are their hands pointing? If the pictures tell a story (and they do), what story is being told? If you are using a spread, does one suit "dominate" the spread? Are any suits missing? Do any numbers repeat? What might that suggest?

After getting an overall impression of the cards, move through the cards in sequence, paying attention to each one. Is the card a Major or a Minor? What emotion does the card suggest? If the person on the card could speak, what would he or she say? What is he or she about to do? What action might the card represent?

Are any cards upside down? If so, they are considered *reversed*. There are many ways to deal with reversed cards:

*Reverse the meaning.* Some readers literally “reverse” the meaning of reversed cards. The reversed Death trump, for example, might herald a birth.

*See the meaning as repressed or obstructed.* Some consider the energy represented by a reversed card is being hindered or held back in some way. The Da Vinci Tarot Six of Swords, for example, is normally associated with direction, navigation, taking risks, or braving the unknown. Reversed, it could indicate that someone wants to take a risk, but is holding back out of a fear of failure.

*Interpret the card as an unrealized potential.* Some see reversed cards as “seeds”, or energies that are lying dormant until the best time for their expression. The reversed Hermit, for example, may prompt discussion about the best time to schedule a retreat or withdrawal.

*Turn them upright.* Many people ignore reversals entirely, preferring to work with upright cards only. If the idea of working with reversed cards doesn’t appeal to you, you don’t have to do so.

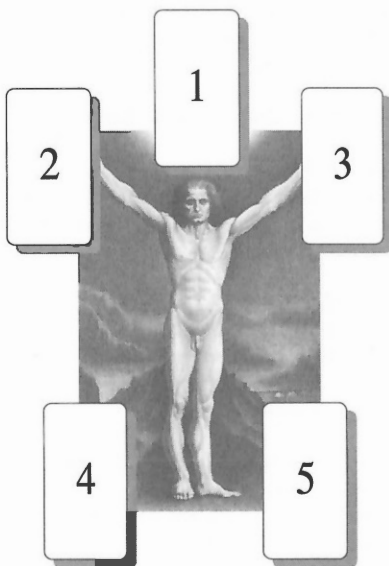
As you explore the cards one by one, you will begin to sense the flow of the underlying story – and the personal message the cards have for you. Once you feel comfortable with each individual card, look at the entire spread again. Can you formulate an answer to your question by retracing your steps from card to card?

After writing down your impressions, you may feel completely satisfied (and have no need to consult a book!). If you feel uncertain at all, or if feel you need additional insight, the guidebook can provide you with a wealth of information.

## Spreads to Try

### *The Pentacle Spread*

The Pentacle Spread was inspired by Da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man*, who appears on the Ace of Swords. Note how his posture – the positioning of his head, his hands, and his feet – suggests the shape of pentacle (or five-pointed star). The cards drawn for this spread should be placed in a star-shaped layout that recalls the placement of the head, hands, and feet of the *Vitruvian Man*.



1) The Head represents you, your desires, your problems, or your fears, with reference to the question under consideration.

2) The Right Hand suggests an action or attitude that could help you fulfill your desire, resolve your problem, or overcome your fear.

3) The Left Hand suggests actions or attitudes that could hamper your success, frustrate your progress, or limit your happiness.

4) The Right Foot reveals an outcome or event that will occur if you forge ahead and take action now.

5) The Left Foot reveals an outcome or event that will occur if you do nothing or retreat.

If you like, at the conclusion of the reading, you may draw a sixth card – The Navel – in order to get one last piece of advice with regard to your situation. Consider the message embedded in this card to be wise advice from the perspective of an old and experienced friend.

#### *The Da Vinci Insight and Inspiration Spread*

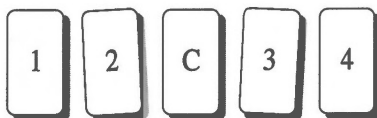
1) Pick a problem or challenge.

2) Turn the deck face-up. Look through the cards and select one you feel represents the challenge that you face. Place this card, the Challenge card, face up on the table.

3) Shuffle the deck.

4) Randomly draw four cards. Place two face-down on the left of your Challenge card. Place the other two face-down to the right of your Challenge card. The result, forming a line, will look as in the figure.

If you like, shift cards one through four



slightly to suggest the shape of Da Vinci's bat-winged flying machine found on the Fool card. (Doing so may help you "soar above" your obstacles and enhance your success!)

5) Reveal the cards one by one, interpreting them as follows:

Card One - A solution that would break the rules

Card Two - A solution rooted in a change of perspective

Card Three - A solution that requires more or different resources

Card Four - A solution that will save time, effort, or money

Brainstorm with the cards, allowing your intuition to lead you in any and all directions. As inspirations occur to you, jot them down. Do not discard any inspirations, no matter how bizarre or outlandish they may seem at first! The goal is to generate as many options for action as possible.

After your inspiration phase is complete, you can critique your list of solutions and choose the one that seems best to you.



## Chapter Six:

# A Card Commentary

This chapter explores the cards of the Da Vinci Tarot in depth, providing insights into:

Actions, attitudes, and approaches encouraged and discouraged by each card  
The source image(s) adapted for each card's illustration

A poetic commentary further illuminating each card's assigned meaning

Exploration questions designed to help you apply card meanings to your specific situation

These meanings are supplied as guides to aid you in your quest for insight and inspiration. Like Da Vinci, however, you should feel free to innovate. If you feel led to do so, ignore the rules, break the mold, and decide for yourself what each card means to you.

### Trump 0 – The Fool

*Encourages:* taking risks, allowing dreams to take flight, achieving what others say is impossible, lightheartedness, enjoying the process of discovery, wise innocence.

*Cautions against:* foolhardiness, detrimental spontaneity, impulsive behaviors, leaping without looking first, negligence, madness, folly.

*Illustration Notes:* In this picture, Da Vinci's bat-winged flying machine soars above the ramparts of a castle. In doing so, it defies conventional wisdom and literally flies in the face of the rules that limit sober little minds. The Fool's unique take on life leads to risk-taking and law-breaking – a good thing, applied creatively, but a bad thing, applied destructively.

### Commentary

Traditionally, the merry Fool walks carelessly along the edge of a precipice. (In even earlier decks, he was often portrayed as a ragged vagabond.) Whatever his guise, the Fool operates outside the expectations of conventional society. He is the jester, pulling at the beard of the king. Out of innocence, folly, or genius, he does not do what he should, and does what he should not.

Whatever your situation, the Fool encourages you to take an unconventional approach. Test limits. Try the unexpected. Take a leap of faith. These actions can expand your experience – and your world. Be aware, however, that foolishness is best when taken in small doses. Wear the jester's costume twenty-four hours a day, and your losses may soon outweigh your discoveries.

### Exploration Questions

What rules govern this situation? What would happen if I broke a few?

How can I step outside the expected and ordinary?

How can I regain the thrill of discovery... and see the world with fresh eyes again?

### Trump I – The Magician

*Encourages:* exercising your powers and capabilities, putting skill into motion, channeling divine power, masculine energy, independence.

*Cautions against:* egotism, deliberately deceiving others, using tricks and "spin" to cast information in a better light, social climbing.

*Illustration Notes:* This illustration adapts an image from one of Da Vinci's most

hotly contested works. (Many remain unconvinced the work is Da Vinci's.) The pose suggests the figure may have originally been *John the Baptist*; at some point, he was transformed into *Bacchus*. The staff appears in the original; the cup, sword, and coin are peculiar to this adaptation.

### Commentary

In earlier decks, this trump depicts a lowly street conjuror, tricking passers-by with cups and balls. Much later, this pretender was promoted to the heady and powerful role of Magician: an empowered wizard, capable of channeling heavenly power as a means of manifesting Divine Will here on earth.

The Magician is now associated with themes of empowerment and ability; in readings, he suggests you use your authority and initiative to achieve your goals. What tools are at your disposal? What talents can you deploy? How might your situation change if you invested tremendous focus and energy into making a difference today?

### Exploration Questions

How might my plans be a part of a much larger design?

What skills can I deploy to make my ideas into realities?

Who is empowered to create and maintain change in this situation?

### Trump II – The High Priestess

*Encourages:* engaging in study, using one's intuition to solve problems and seek answers, creating puzzles and enigmas, perpetuating mysteries.

*Cautions against:* reveling in ignorance, maintaining prejudices, paranoia, exaggerating what remains unknown, dispensing with tradition without regard for the consequences of doing so.

*Illustration Notes:* Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*

is one of the best recognized images in human history. Especially given the current debate over her true gender, she is an especially appropriate choice for The Priestess (or Papesse, or Female Pope). Older decks depict a woman in the garb of the Pope: pure heresy. Later decks "dignify" the figure, giving her the title of Priestess.

### Commentary

The Papesse, or Female Pope, is one of the most puzzling cards in the deck. It may recall the legend of Pope Joan, a woman said to have been elected Pope and exposed by an unexpected pregnancy. More likely, it recalls Sister Manfreda – an ancestor of the Visconti family, the patrons of Da Vinci – who was elected Pope by a heretical sect and burned at the stake in 1300.

All these stories are thematically appropriate for this card, which is traditionally associated with secrecy, intuition (once considered a purely feminine trait), reflection, and mysterious processes. Consider how these qualities can be employed in your situation. What might happen if you approach your problem as a puzzle to be solved... or a code to be broken?

### Exploration Questions

What's hidden? What is it that people aren't admitting or saying?

What does your intuition tell you about this situation?

What would happen if you broke with tradition and did something truly audacious?

### Trump III – The Empress

*Encourages:* expressions of feminine energy, celebrations of women's energy and power, nurturing, productivity, fertility, earthy sensuality and sexuality.

*Cautions against:* taking credit for products and successes to which you have no claim, slothfulness, disconnection from nature and the natural world, sterility.

*Illustration Notes:* The Empress is based on the *Portrait of a Young Woman*. Interestingly, scholars continue to debate whether this work should, in fact, be attributed to Da Vinci. It was not uncommon for Masters to delegate work to apprentices or contractors, and many believe this portrait may actually have been painted by Ambrogio de Predis.

### Commentary

This Empress, unlike her pregnant, glowing sisters in occult decks, is more poised and formal. Her traditional concerns – fertility, growth, and productivity – are symbolized here by a single flower (an icon lifted from Da Vinci's sketchbooks). Even so, she remains a vessel for formidable feminine energy.

At what does the Empress gaze? The Empire beyond her window? Adoring subjects? The products of her influence? Of course, she may also be looking within: longing to escape her ivory tower, dreaming of a return to nature, recalling the freedoms and luxuries savored by a simple farm girl before her rise to power.

### Exploration Questions

What role does feminine energy play in my current situation?

How careful am I to assume responsibility for the work assigned to me?

How can I be more productive? How can I nurture my own talents and gifts?

### Trump IV – The Emperor

*Encourages:* following rules, emphasizing order, asserting your power or authority, taking control of a situation, making difficult but necessary decisions, taking command.

*Cautions against:* becoming a petty dictator, enforcing arbitrary or onerous rules, practicing tyranny, encountering strong opposition, becoming arrogant.

*Illustration Notes:* The glyph in the win-

dow above Da Vinci's distinctive mirror-writing is an eagle-on-globe motif adapted from a sketch: "Allegory of a Wolf and Eagle". (The wolf, in a boat, also appears on the Six of Swords). The Emperor himself bears some resemblance to Ludovico Sforza, Da Vinci's patron during some of his most productive years.

### Commentary

The Emperor sits rigidly on his throne, his formal posture hardly softened by his flowing robes. He is on the edge of his seat, ready to take action at a moment's notice. He holds a sphere of authority – he's literally got the whole world in his hands. In his left hand is a staff or wand: a testimony to the fact that the Emperor's will is law.

A thriving empire is a well-oiled machine; the Emperor is its designer and chief engineer. Your situation demands an intimate acquaintance with the detail – clear insight into how one thing impacts another. With this in hand, it falls to you to determine rules and limit options. Just remember: absolute authority and absolute accountability go hand in hand.

### Exploration Questions

What role does masculine energy play in my current situation?

Where do I have authority in my life?

How am I held accountable for my responsibilities?

### Trump V – The Hierophant

*Encourages:* seeking inspiration, charitable giving, relieving the suffering of others, exercising patience, adhering to and valuing tradition.

*Cautions against:* intolerance of others, mindless adherence to senseless dogma, valuing institutions over the people they serve, indulging in wanton immorality.

*Illustration Notes:* The glyph in the window is taken from Da Vinci's plans for an

unfinished basilica; it represents the “squaring of the circle”, an attempt to express perfection through geometric forms. The Pope himself is based on Raphael’s portrait of Julius II.

### Commentary

Just as they converted the bizarre Papesse into a priestess, the occultists promoted the more familiar Pope to the position of Hierophant. The figure here is more sympathetic, more traditional, and, some would say, more approachable. It’s wise, though, to keep in mind that this kindly-looking man embodies all the power represented by the traditional Church.

This card encourages you to attune yourself to the energy of all that’s good and holy. Exercise your authority with grace. Give tradition its proper place. Be open to guidance, especially if it comes from those who are older and more experienced, or who have your best interests at heart. Beware, however, a tendency to emphasize rules over results.

### Exploration Questions

What authorities influence my situation?  
How can I be both authoritative and approachable?  
What role should tradition play in this situation?

### Trump VI – The Lovers

*Encourages:* making good choices, collaborating with others, attempting to beat the odds, signing contracts, joining with others (professionally, socially, or romantically).

*Cautions against:* being unfaithful, failing to honor vows or promises, breaking away, divorce, separation, putting off important actions or decisions for too long.

*Illustration Notes:* Without question, the Lovers card is one of the most surprising in the deck. Instead of the familiar “Adam and Eve in the Garden” motif found in

occult decks, we see here Da Vinci’s *Cotition of Hemisected Man and Woman*. Though initially shocking, the image suggests the achievement of the alchemist’s quest: the fusion of parts into a unified whole.

### Commentary

We often speak of lovers becoming “lost in each other’s eyes”. Here, that joyous loss is made manifest on the physical plane: man and woman have literally become one. The resulting hermaphrodite may strike us as freakish... but for centuries, figures that were half-man, half-woman were symbols of ultimate transcendence and spiritual achievement.

Cupid’s arrow has become an icon on the wall – but this pair is too engrossed in each other to notice. Their romantic rapture holds the key to your situation. Who needs to come together? What can be done to unite those who stand apart from each other? Unexpected gains may come if you are bold enough to unify those elements others never think of pairing.

### Exploration Questions

What’s needed to make this situation complete?  
How capable am I of becoming “lost” in my relationship or work?  
How do my own choices influence the stability and unity of my situation?

### Trump VII – The Chariot

*Encourages:* claiming victory, exercising good management skills, embracing advancement and evolution, pursuing a reward for work well-done, pursuing excellence.

*Cautions against:* pending defeat, an inability to complete a project successfully, uncorrected errors, failure due to inappropriate or shoddy implementation.

*Illustration Notes:* The glyph seen in the background is adapted from one of Da

Vinci's designs for a tank or war machine – an innovation over the chariot, designed to protect the soldier inside. The charging horses are taken from a sketch: “Studio di Cavalli con Cavalieri”. The rider's face has been reversed and is taken from one of many studies in Da Vinci's notebooks.

### **Commentary**

There is a time for reflection, and a time for action; this is the latter. The Chariot has always been associated with triumph and victory, and its appearance in a reading is often cause for celebration. Certainly, it heralds progress and forward motion... but it also warns of the human tendency to ride roughshod over the needs and desires of others.

You've clearly become master and commander of something – and you've earned the title, in battles along the way. How you deploy your newfound authority, however, is a commentary on the advancement of your spirit. Can you ride forward without destroying what has been achieved? Are you mature enough to take the reigns?

### **Exploration Questions**

What past achievements could contribute to progress today?

What will be the outcome of “charging ahead” in this situation?

How willing am I to accept the fact that almost any effort has casualties along the way?

### **Trump VIII – Justice**

*Encourages:* maintaining a level head, obeying the law, seeking balance, emphasizing logic over emotion, submitting one's self to established powers.

*Cautions against:* blind obedience, turning a blind eye to injustice, overlooking one's own transgressions while punishing the transgressions of others.

*Illustration Notes:* Two versions of *The Annunciation*, both attributed to Da Vinci,

survive; this image of Mary is adapted from the version owned by the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. The figure of Mary has been horizontally reversed; the mirror (reflecting a detail from what is generally believed to be Da Vinci's self-portrait) and sword, thematic elements, have been added.

### **Commentary**

When the time comes to meet out justice, we generally prefer for others to face the wrath of her piercing sword. Mercy dawns when we see ourselves reflected in the actions and passions of the accused; our own transgressions – or, at least, transgressions we can understand – evoke our sympathy. We judge ourselves less harshly than we judge others.

Justice encourages you to seek balance – to make objectivity your guiding principle today. As you evaluate the actions and intentions of others, be sure to hold them to the same standard to which you hold yourself. Establish clear guidelines and rules. Without standards, without guidelines, it's impossible to say with authority who has been faithful, and who has transgressed.

### **Exploration Questions**

What standards have been set? How well have they been communicated?

Who is in charge of getting justice in this situation?

How balanced is your approach to this problem? How can you increase that balance?

### **Trump IX – The Hermit**

*Encourages:* prudence, seeking solitude, engaging in meditation or prayer, taking a vow of silence, holding your tongue, making do with less.

*Cautions against:* isolating yourself from others, trying to elicit pity from others, positioning yourself as a victim, envying the achievement of others, selfishness.

*Illustration Notes:* Adapted from Da Vinci's *St. Jerome*, the historical character of St. Jerome, who withdrew into the desert to translate Scriptures, is thematically appropriate for this trump. The image has been reversed (Jerome originally faces right). In the original, St. Jerome holds a stone; here, he holds an hourglass – the signature symbol of Hermits in occult decks.

### **Commentary**

Da Vinci chose to portray St. Jerome in a pose associated more with beggars than scholars; his plight is intended, perhaps, to arouse our emotions. In fact, St. Jerome is considered a church Father, revered for having dedicated his life to isolated study. It is the historical St. Jerome, not Da Vinci's portrait of him, who embodies the ideas often associated with the Tarot Hermit.

The Hermit hints that you need perspective; his strategy is withdrawal. Take a step back. Look at your situation from a more distant, more objective perspective. Seek input and advice from those with more experience. In order to listen for the "still, small voice" that passes along insights from your own best self, you may have to escape the noise and madness of every day life.

### **Exploration Questions**

What mentor or advisor can I call on for advice?

How might stepping back for perspective help me now?

How can I get away from distractions and focus on the problem at hand?

### **Trump X – The Wheel**

*Encourages:* taking advantage of opportunities as they are presented to you, acknowledging "what goes around, comes around", seeing life as a series of cycles, pushing your luck.

*Cautions against:* seeing yourself as a

victim of fate, using Tarot cards in ways that negate free will, impending instability, loss of control, generating bad karma for yourself or others.

*Illustration Notes:* Adapted from *The Virgin of the Rocks*, the Angel Uriel ("God is My Light") turns the wheel and grasps a sword. According to Christian folklore, Uriel was charged with the protection of John the Baptist during Herod's slaughter of the innocents. The meeting between Uriel and Mary is not found in Scripture, but was a popular motif in Da Vinci's day.

### **Commentary**

Whose hand turns The Wheel? Traditionally, gods, goddesses, God, or the Universe have been seen as the "ghosts in the machine", cranking out a pattern of events that we experience, but which we cannot control. Whatever you believe, the Wheel is oblivious: it turns and turns and turns, with no sign of stopping, ever.

Straining against the machinery of fate is a waste of time. Instead, align yourself as closely as possible with unfolding events. Instead of whining about the game, play the hand you're dealt. Luck may limit what comes your way, but you control how you respond to your circumstances. Understand this, and you'll come as close as anyone can to "taking the Wheel" of your own life.

### **Exploration Questions**

How might different actions or reactions turn my run of "bad luck" around?

How can I make the most of whatever my situation is?

Looking back, can I detect cycles or patterns that could help me make better decisions today?

### **Trump XI – Strength**

*Encourages:* being energetic, exerting yourself, engaging in hard work, exercising discipline or self-discipline, being

courageous, seeking to be your best possible self.

*Cautions against:* being lazy, giving in to impulses and trivial desires, showing or condoning weakness, failing to make the most of the strengths you've been given.

*Illustration Notes:* We see here the figure of Mary, adapted from Da Vinci's *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne*. Art critics have long debated the strange posture assigned to Mary in the original work; it does, in fact, recall the posture of the woman traditionally found on the Strength card in many esoteric Tarots. The lion is added, of course, and adapted from other sketches.

### Commentary

What do you think of when you hear the word "strength"? For many, physical strength or force comes to mind (an idea echoed by the glyph in the background of this card, which features one of Da Vinci's cannons). But, especially in modern times, strength of character – moral strength, or virtue – is in much shorter supply.

Traditionally, the figure on this card subdues a lion, demonstrating the power virtue has to tame savage instincts. Your own struggle, perhaps, incorporates a need to wrestle impulses to the ground: to transcend what your animal self longs to do, and to submit yourself to the discipline recommended by your Highest Self.

### Exploration Questions

To what extent can I reign in negative impulses?

How self-disciplined am I? How can I be more so?

What application of force is needed to change my situation for the better?

### Trump XII – The Hanged Man

*Encourages:* adopting a sacrificial attitude, seeking transformation through sac-

rifice, maintaining idealism, seeking mystic ecstasy.

*Cautions against:* pending punishment, discovery of wrong-doing or betrayal, looming illness, impotence, the existence of a traitor.

*Illustration Notes:* This grisly image takes literally the phrase "hanged man". In esoteric decks, the hanged man is usually depicted as hanging by one ankle, a method once preferred for traitors. This figure comes from Da Vinci's study of the hanging of Bernardo di Bandino Baroncelli, who was put to death for his participation in the assassination of Giuliano de' Medici.

### Commentary

The creak of the rope, the fluttering of the robes... more traditional decks depict a man transformed by trial, but here, all we see is the unhappy end of a violent man. The meanings assigned to the card transcend the obvious, however. Some might see the execution of a criminal as a sacrifice: an appeasement to the gods of civility and order.

Certainly, the theme of suspension and sacrifice applies to your situation. Something is blocked or "hung", and a sacrifice of some kind is required to make things right again. Consider the resources at your disposal: time, energy, effort. How might any of these be "sacrificed" in a way that would empower you once again?

### Exploration Questions

What could I give up in order to move forward?

How likely is it that my situation is due to the interference of a traitor?

How would I feel if called upon to make a personal sacrifice of some kind?

### Trump XIII – Death

*Encourages:* sudden and radical change, bringing things to an end, seeking trans-



formation or initiation, getting down to the “bare bones” of an issue, acknowledging sober realities.

*Cautions against:* encountering a serious impediment, experiencing extreme adversity, unanswered calls for aid or assistance, an event that cannot be avoided or postponed.

*Illustration Notes:* An allegorical sketch of Envy – raising her arm to block the gaze of Heaven – rides atop a vehicle based on one of Da Vinci’s most fiendish inventions: a multi-bladed battle wagon. (Da Vinci admitted it would likely do as much damage to friends as it did to foes.) She holds aloft a skull based on one of Da Vinci’s anatomical studies.

### Commentary

How did you first encounter Death? Our faith can comfort us, and healthy habits can prolong our lives, but, whether we like it or not, death has an appointment with us all. There’s no need for panic, though: this card employs death as a symbol, not a verdict. All things end. Endings often disappoint us; occasionally, however, the “death” of an issue can provide welcome release.

As you gaze upon this card, pay close attention to the attitudes and issues raised by staring Death in the face. Somewhere in those responses lurks an answer – an insight, perhaps cloaked by fear, that could prove useful in your situation. Do you need more faith? Is there something you need to give up? Is it time to embrace something you’ve put off as long as possible?

### Exploration Questions

With an eye toward improving my life, what might I need to put aside for now? How do I feel about the fact that there are some forces I can’t control? What do I want to be sure to accomplish before I pass away? Why not start that project today?

### Trump XIV – Temperance

*Encourages:* seeking middle ground, synthesizing varied approaches or opinions, negotiations, collaborations, calling for unity, adaptability, healing, healthful rest.

*Cautions against:* worry, anxiety, going to extremes, forcing others to accept an opinion or verdict with which they disagree, addiction, wanton indulgence.

*Illustration Notes:* The angel seen here has been adapted from Da Vinci’s *Annunciation*. Originally the harbinger of Mary’s pregnancy, this angelic figure has been reversed (she originally faced right), and her posture amended to accommodate the two vials she now holds. The thematically appropriate glyph suggests a device incorporating opposing forces.

### Commentary

The Temperance angel calls to mind the goddess Iris, whose personal symbol, the rainbow, was a promise of peace in the wake of storms. Here, she kneels and focuses on her work, pouring water from a golden vase into another made of silver. This act has long symbolized the goal of temperance: a skillful blending of opposites to produce a Supreme Synthesis.

Your situation, then, calls for a similar skill. Polarities attract us, but the safest and most productive paths usually avoid extremes. Take the options you have in mind and find the middle ground. If a disagreement is in progress, seek common ground. If considering two options for action, the best course will incorporate elements of both.

### Exploration Questions

How can I find the middle ground in this situation? What is the solution that would give everyone involved something of value? How can I blend several different approaches together into something new?

## Trump XV – The Devil

*Encourages:* paying attention to instinct, practicing or giving into subtle charms, reveling in or celebrating sensuality, being open to suggestion.

*Cautions against:* descent into perversion, perpetuating or being distracted by agitation, allowing your viewpoint or approach to be dictated by hatred or other negative emotions.

*Illustration Notes:* The character of The Devil has been adapted from a caricature of an elderly woman and any of several anatomical studies. Da Vinci was fascinated by fantastic beasts; the winged dragon seen here is much a sketchbook entry titled “*Drago che abbatte un leone*” (“A dragon attacks a lion”). The glyph is likely a mask design: a hybrid musician/animal.

### Commentary

Especially for beginners, the Devil is frequently considered one of the most fearsome cards in a Tarot deck. Traditionally, humans assign to demons and dark spirits those aspects of ourselves we prefer to deny. The Devil, then, often prompts us to consider what dimensions of our situation are being governed by Shadow.

Here, the Devil steers his Beast by the neck. The message is clear: properly restrained, sensual pleasures can convey us to valuable insights and experiences. The rider must at all times be aware of the power of the beast; should a struggle for control occur, liberal application of the pitchfork may goad the dragon (and us) back onto the straight and narrow.

### Exploration Questions

What aspects of this situation would I prefer to deny or ignore?

What has been “forbidden” or suppressed in your situation? By whom? Why?

How well-attuned to your instincts are you? How firmly are you in control of them?

## Trump XVI – The Tower

*Encourages:* starting over, escaping, departing quickly, embracing chaos and change, looking for Divine will in unfathomable events, emphasizing safety.

*Cautions against:* impending exile, believing that any future is set in stone, failing to anticipate issues and challenges, ignoring danger, unexpected accidents.

*Illustration Notes:* The structure seen here is reminiscent of Sforza Castle in Milan, with its fat turrets and distinctive arches, but it is actually based on a notebook sketch. The glyph in the upper right of the illustration, taken from a sketch of a fortification, is accompanied by the card’s French title as it would appear when written in Da Vinci’s characteristic mirror script.

### Commentary

Inspiration – and bad luck – frequently hit us “like a bolt from the blue”. Here, the spark that puts events in motion also demolishes a work of art – a soaring tower, which might be seen as a testimony to the human desire to ascend to the highest heights. The tower is a potent symbol of our aspirations; the lightning reminds us that best-laid plans don’t always succeed.

This is not always a bad thing. Demolition paves the way for new construction. If we’re clever, even sudden disaster can be transmuted into a catalyst for change. When lightning strikes, we’d do well to pause and reflect. What portions of our plans are worth saving? How might an unexpected setback conceal the handiwork of God?

### Exploration Questions

How well do I deal with setbacks and surprises?

How can I “go with the flow” and release my expectations?

How can I incorporate and make best use of the unexpected?

### **Trump XVII – The Stars**

*Encourages:* opening yourself to new ideas, following intuitive signs to new destinations, good navigation, renewed hope, finding peace, expressing optimism.

*Cautions against:* abandoning yourself to the whimsy of pure fate, giving too much thought and energy to ill omens, resigning yourself to having been “born under a bad sign”.

*Illustration Notes:* This image – a figure, reaching for an eight-pointed star – is commonly associated with the Star trump; a similar image appears, in fact, in the Visconti-Sforza Tarot. The female figure here is adapted from one of Da Vinci’s sketches of female dancers; her companion appears on The Moon.

### **Commentary**

All a sailor needs is a tall ship... and a star to steer her by. It may well be that all you need is a star – a single, gentle light capable of steering you toward better times. With your head down, though, you won’t see the stars... so keep your chin up. There’s a sky full of a “thousand points of light” just overhead for those who care to look.

Up close, stars are as huge and bright as our own Sun... it’s our perspective that reduces these giants to little more than glitter. Perspective may also be distorting your personal point of view – so why not shift your perspective in a positive direction? A little optimism goes a long way, so hitch your wagon to a star. You’ll never get your wish, if you never pause to make one.

### **Exploration Questions**

To what extent am I an optimist? Why? What signs may be pointing the way to a better situation for me?

In your situation, how can you “reach for the stars”?

### **Trump XVIII – The Moon**

*Encourages:* paying attention to dreams and visions, longing for or going on adventures, breaking out of routine, indulging in romantic gestures, observing cycles and seasons.

*Cautions against:* a tendency toward self-deception or deceiving others, allowing fantasy to intrude upon practical concerns, living too much in your own head, losing control.

*Illustration Notes:* This trump illustration – a woman with a crescent moon in her upraised hand – recalls traditional images found on the earliest surviving versions of this card, particularly the Visconti-Sforza Moon. A figure from a sketch of three women dancing has been adapted here; the crescent in her upraised hand has been added.

### **Commentary**

How many full moons have you seen? As you shuffle from appointment to appointment, how often do you crane your neck back and trace the moon’s path through the nighttime sky? The Moon’s gravity moves oceans... yet all too many of us imagine the Moon is inconsequential, having no effect at all on folks like you and me.

If we allow it to, the Moon can inspire and guide us. It waxes and wanes, teaching us that all things come, and go, and come again. Its light complements our features, adding a hint of mystery and a touch of romance. When we really let go, we say we’re “howling at the moon”, and that, in proper measure, can be a good recipe for a more enjoyable life.

### **Exploration Questions**

How might you benefit from “howling at the moon” a bit today?

What cycles are at work in your current situation?

How can you introduce the qualities of moonlight into your approach to your problem?

### **Trump XIX – The Sun**

*Encourages:* seeking agreement, making friends, giving and receiving affection, expressing love, honorable actions, experiencing extreme joy and success.

*Cautions against:* an unhealthy craving for affection and affirmation, self-absorption, using love as a lever to get your way, calling undue attention to yourself.

*Illustration Notes:* The sun glyph in the upper left of the image is paired with the card's Italian title, written in mirror-script. The cherubs here, adapted from *Leda and the Swan*, are related, of course, to the beaming child depicted on this trump in certain occult decks. Their innocence and gentleness belie the violence inherent in their creation.

### **Commentary**

These innocent babes embody tenderness and mutual affection, and their environment is as fertile a place as you will ever find for growth and celebration. At this point in their lives, they are incapable of guile or violence – despite the fact that, according to myth, their mother, Leda, was raped by Zeus, the father of the Gods.

In readings, The Sun heralds an expansive moment of pure joy. Whatever has happened in the past, relish this rare moment of warmth. Keep in mind, though, that time is a series of events; however pleasant the present may be, past actions still have future consequences. Extend this golden time by considering what futures may be nurtured by the glow of today's achievements.

### **Exploration Questions**

How can I preserve peace and prosperity

by taking right action right now?

What ultimate result will my current actions bring about?

How can I avoid becoming blinded by the bright light of my own achievements?

### **Trump XX – Judgement**

*Encourages:* seeking renewal, healthy births, rebirth, recapturing your sense of spirituality, awakening to a new life or new experience, obeying the Universe's call to action.

*Cautions against:* allowing life to be ruled by doubts, substituting doubt for faith, allowing yourself to be haunted by the past, taking actions you'll regret, prolonged illness.

*Illustration Notes:* An angel, adapted from an ink and brown wash sketch depicting an angel placing a shield atop a trophy, is given a trumpet in this illustration, aligning the image with motifs frequently seen on Judgment cards in other decks. Beneath her, the heads and torsos from three of Da Vinci's anatomical studies appear to be rising from the earth itself.

### **Commentary**

Traditionally, the figures at the bottom of this card are resurrected – arms outreached, coffins cast aside, filled with joy. Here, they seem caught in the quagmire of the physical realm – even though such obsessions have reduced them to nothing more than skin and bones. They see their situation, but they're blind to the angel overhead.

Science will only take you so far. Once you've mapped the world, then what? The physical realm has its charms... but, deep inside, most of us feel the stirrings of something we can't measure in milligrams and gigawatts. Da Vinci was fascinated with the body... but also with the spirit. What might happen if you responded to the trumpet call and embraced, for once, the impossible?

### Exploration Questions

How would you describe your faith? In what do you place your faith? Why? Do you tend to focus on the mundane... or the magical? Why? How might your life be transformed by a shift in focus?

### Trump XXI – The World

*Encourages:* accepting rewards and acknowledgements with grace, the achievement of perfection, striving for success, awareness and attunement to opportunities for success.

*Cautions against:* allowing pride to distort assessments of success, failing to perform the due diligence necessary to guarantee success, allowing opportunities to pass you by.

*Illustration Notes:* The figure here is adapted from Da Vinci's *Leda and the Swan*. With the context of the original image removed, the woman's posture suggests a she is engaged in a sensuous dance. Traditionally, the World trump in many decks portrays an unclothed female (or hermaphroditic) figure dancing in the center of a stylized wreath or *mandalora*.

### Commentary

What does it mean to have it all? Traditionally, this card heralds supreme success and fulfillment. The figure on The Sun looks almost embarrassed – not at her nakedness, which symbolizes her confidence and transformation, but at the degree of her achievement. She is confident, comfortable, satisfied, and whole.

Moments so ripe with grace are rare indeed. This is a time to seek and celebrate your own wholeness, to relish what you've been given, and to acknowledge the successes you richly deserve. New ventures are favored. Options abound. For now, your will and the will of the Universe are perfectly aligned. What will you do with this remarkable opportunity?

### Exploration Questions

What would I have to achieve or acquire in order to feel complete and whole? How can I work to preserve a sense of completion and satisfaction? How can take best advantage of the positive energy at my disposal?

### Ace of Wands

*Encourages:* taking action now, beginning a new venture, starting a voyage, maternity, trying to get pregnant, establishing a goal and pursuing it with focus and passion.

*Cautions against:* failure to take a long-term view of a current project, getting so wrapped up in today's tasks that you neglect the future, neglecting other priorities and obligations.

*Illustration Notes:* Much of the hypnotic realism of Da Vinci's work stems from his fascination with physiology. He approached the anatomy of the human body with all the focused attention of an inventor, as though seeking insight into the inner workings of an elaborate machine. The image on this card is adapted from one of Da Vinci's sketches of an unborn child.

### Commentary

Whether your question concerns the possibility of a birth or not, this moment is pregnant with potential. Don't delay; the time is ripe for launching new ventures and taking first steps. If you've clearly defined your goal, prompt action virtually guarantees success... so make your move! Debating further will only work against you.

From the smallest of cells, we grow into human beings with virtually unlimited potential. Be aware that your current course of action will give rise to "new life" – and, with that in mind, make sure that the life you're creating is a life you want to live. As you take advantage of this

opportunity, be sure you don't allow your other "children" to suffer from neglect.

### Exploration Questions

With an eye toward my future, what steps can I take right now, today?

How can I move one priority forward without neglecting the others?

How might small actions, taken today, influence the course of the future?

### Two of Wands

*Encourages:* resting, reflecting, admitting you need a break, knowing when to back off, pausing to reflect on your achievements, taking time for yourself.

*Cautions against:* pushing forward until you are exhausted, making a nuisance of yourself by relentlessly pursuing your own agenda, falling into depression due to a lack of progress.

*Illustration Notes:* Da Vinci's portrait of *St. John the Baptist* (see the Four of Swords) betrays a peculiar tendency on the part of the master to render certain men in soft or effeminate poses. Here, another John – the "Beloved Disciple" from *The Last Supper* – is depicted the same way, prompting speculation that Da Vinci intended the figure to be Mary Magdalene.

### Commentary

Is this figure, adapted from *The Last Supper*, John or Mary? That question fuels a great deal of speculation; that speculation has spawned a great deal of debate – along with hundreds of web sites, an amazingly popular novel, and uncounted books by a congregation of experts in matters of art and faith.

Whatever your opinion on this and other questions, the Two of Wands suggests it may be time to step back, take a deep breath, and reflect on your ultimate goal. What do you really hope to achieve? What's the point of your current effort?

By taking a moment to center yourself, you avoid the extremes of obsession and regain the attitude of peace you see depicted here.

### Exploration Questions

What argument or obsession do I need to drop for my own good?

How long has it been since I took time to evaluate my own progress?

How might taking a break actually speed my progress toward my goal?

### Three of Wands

*Encourages:* making and implementing plans, taking that critical first step, moving ahead, self-protection, resistance to forces which seek to harm or hinder you.

*Cautions against:* rash action, allowing oneself to be ambushed, participating in or ignoring conspiracies, dismissing unseen dangers.

*Illustration Notes:* The distinctive posture and expression of the figure on this card clearly identifies him as Peter, from Da Vinci's masterpiece, *The Last Supper*. The blade concealed behind Peter's back is the same one he used to cut off a soldier's ear. Though initially ready to fight for Jesus, Peter would later deny having known Him.

### Commentary

Just days after Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, soldiers arrived in the garden at Gethsemane to take Jesus into custody. Peter – whose name literally means "the rock" – took up a sword and slashed off the ear of one soldier. Though ready to fight for his Master in the garden, within hours Peter would deny knowing him.

Above Peter's head are three wands – two united, and one diametrically opposed to their unity. Somewhere, most likely unseen, discord is at work. And while we may believe we are well-defended, others may, when a critical moment comes, deny

their association with us. To make the most of a potentially bad situation, have your own plans well in hand.

### Exploration Questions

What's my "Plan B?"

What am I overlooking? How can I plan for contingencies?

How can I draw closer to those who really would stick with me through anything?

### Four of Wands

*Encourages:* devotion, loving care, tenderness, nurturing, allowing yourself to be vulnerable, showing your softer side, pausing to care for yourself and others.

*Cautions against:* becoming overly fragile, allowing genuine concern to decay into obsession and unhealthy interest, over-protectiveness.

*Illustration Notes:* The primary figures here have been adapted from Da Vinci's *Madonna of the Carnation*, so named due to the flower Mary holds in the original. Both that flower and a nearby vase of flowers have been excised from this image in order to emphasize the relationship between the mother and child.

### Commentary

As babes, we are awkward, uncoordinated, and incapable of caring for our own needs. We are blessed, then, with parents, caretakers, and mentors... older, more mature individuals who invest time, attention, and affection in an effort to help us reach our full potential. Their plans are delayed or set aside for our benefit.

Whatever your goals, this card encourages you to pause in your pursuit of progress and consider lending a hand to others – or, perhaps, acknowledging your own need for help. While pausing to get or lend assistance may, at first, seem to slow your forward momentum, the benefits derived from nurturing yourself or others will ultimately pay off.

### Exploration Questions

How can I be more approachable and vulnerable?

Who needs my help? How can I freely give it?

What am I doing to nurture myself? To nurture others?

### Five of Wands

*Encourages:* caution, being honest about your fears and concerns, admitting your personal weaknesses, submitting yourself to others.

*Cautions against:* hiding your weaknesses, allowing yourself to be ruled by fear, making decisions based on fear, hiding your true feelings.

*Illustration Notes:* Beneath a glaring sun, a hooded figure crouches in unfriendly territory. The character's posture suggests hesitancy and fearfulness; she hunches forward, hiding her face behind an elaborate shield.

### Commentary

What do you fear? Our friend in the illustration appears to fear the bright light of day. Ironically, her shield of choice is emblazoned with the signature symbol of the energy she seeks to avoid. All too often, our fears are efforts to shield ourselves from potential growth. In your situation, it's time to come face to face with facts you dread most.

When the Five of Wands appears, dedicate yourself to boldness. Avoid conflict by being honest about your limitations and short comings. Share your feelings openly. Give your opinion without suffering qualms. A hesitant voice will position you as weak or insincere; this is a time for direct speech and a confident demeanor.

### Exploration Questions

How can I project confidence... and caution?

What are my weaknesses? How do I compensate for them?

What would happen if I revealed my true feelings?

### Six of Wands

*Encourages:* defending others, standing up for what is right, claiming rightful victory, acting in accordance with law, taking action for the common good.

*Cautions against:* becoming an overbearing person, doing what you want despite the consequences to others, bullying others, acts of abuse or misuse of force.

*Illustration Notes:* The central image – the horseman in his flowing robes atop a rearing steed – is taken from one of many studies Da Vinci created for the Sforza Monument. The cowering figure – usually face down, here, shown face up – is adapted from sketches for both the Sforza and Trivulzio monuments.

### Commentary

On an isolated stretch of rarely-traveled road – outside Samaria, perhaps? – a naked, wounded man cowers beneath the bulk and power of a horse and rider. Without context, our imaginations must supply the story. Has the rider arrived to defend and avenge? Or is he the attacker, trampling down those hapless travelers he deems to be easy prey?

The wands above their heads may provide a clue: four (the number of stability, authority, and force) are aligned together. These are aligned in service to one of the two remaining wands (but not the other!). In this situation – and, indeed, in your own – the question arises: what motives govern the actions of those in power? Are they with you – or against you?

### Exploration Questions

Are my personal powers being used for good... or ill?

How far am I willing to go if my own actions cause others loss or pain?

What role do I tend to play: protector or bully?

### Seven of Wands

*Encourages:* lively debate, healthy competition, celebration of contrasts, embracing diversity, competition between well-matched adversaries.

*Cautions against:* impending war, extended discord, arguments, petty disagreements, an addiction to confrontation, a clash between poorly matched contestants.

*Illustration Notes:* The tight framing and bewildering arrangement of horses, riders, helmets, and weapons make this one of the most frenzied cards in the deck. The scene is a detail from Da Vinci's *The Battle of Anghiari*. The original work, executed in an experimental medium, deteriorated quickly. This image is from a copy by Peter Paul Rubens.

### Commentary

How do you respond to competition and challenges? In theory, pressure to perform brings out the best in us all... but for the ill-prepared, too much pressure produces nothing more than a collapse. To survive and thrive in the battle, focus, keep a cool head, and remember your goals. This approach lends meaning to what might otherwise be taken for an empty skirmish.

This card calls on you to step back and analyze your situation with the eye of a warrior. Ships don't always sail smoothly; progress sometimes requires you to weather a storm or two. See clashes for what they are: signs of diversity. Before you become involved in the fray, take a moment to recall why you joined the battle in the first place.

### Exploration Questions

How do I respond to conflict? Why do I respond in that way?

How can I keep a cool head, when others are becoming aggressively overheated?

What role does this battle play in the larger war?



## **Eight of Wands**

*Encourages:* trying to foresee the future, extrapolating future performance from data on the present or past, applying yourself to a distant goal, working to secure a future reality.

*Cautions against:* focusing exclusively on the present, resisting change, failing to set appropriate long-term goals, having no desire to improve yourself or your situation.

*Illustration Notes:* Da Vinci's genius wasn't limited to art or abstract mathematics; he frequently paid the bills (and, in fact, won the Duke of Milan as his patron) by dreaming up military innovations. Note how this archer's shield (from the sketchbooks) protects the vulnerable soldier without compromising his view of the battlefield.

### **Commentary**

Clarity and foresight are the order of the day. When you draw the Eight of Wands, you'd do well to ponder your long-term goals. How are things changing? What situations are likely to evolve, given what you know about the here and now? A good defense isn't enough – like the archer on this card, you also need to have one eye on the horizon.

Your success will be greatly enhanced by consulting your personal crystal ball – literally or figuratively. Make forecasts. Run the figures. Consult an oracle. Do whatever you can to define your own most likely future. With that prophecy in hand, plan accordingly. What can you do to better align yourself with tomorrow's realities?

### **Exploration Questions**

How can you get a better idea of how your situation will look in a day? A week? A year?

What elements of your future are under your control?

How can you better align yourself with what you expect will happen?

## **Nine of Wands**

*Encourages:* staging an ardent defense, grasping the fact that this is a critical moment, meeting resistance with a well-planned strategy, protecting your ideas and efforts, taking refuge.

*Cautions against:* being a “doormat” when confronted, refusing to stand up for yourself or others, failing to have the courage of your convictions.

*Illustration Notes:* Take a moment to feel the conflict embodied in the wands at the top of this card! Their weight is awkwardly distributed; in a moment, they will come tumbling down. Beneath them, a sketchbook soldier wields one of Da Vinci's military innovations: an infantry shield with a hinged leg, designed to enhance the invincibility of a line of warriors.

### **Commentary**

The heat is on! The battle is raging! Your ideas and actions are under attack, and, at any minute, you may feel the onslaught of dissent and disagreement. The situation may call for hunkering down – but not for burying your head in the sand. Prepare! Shore up your defenses. Collect the information you need. Make good use of this time.

A good defense requires offensive thinking. How will your enemy strike? What areas of weakness might he or she attempt to exploit? From which direction will the enemy horses come? By fighting an imaginary battle first, you anticipate attacks... and prevent losses. Think of this as an opportunity to prove the worthiness of your plans and ideas.

### **Exploration Questions**

What criticisms are likely? How can I address them ahead of time?

How do I respond when people challenge my ideas and actions?

What good can come from testing ideas or confronting others?

## Ten of Wands

*Encourages:* establishing clear goals, seeking clarity prior to taking action, creating and gaining support from a network of like-minded people.

*Cautions against:* loss, isolation, bewilderment, failing to clarify direction, neglecting to define terms of success, failing to fulfill your potential.

*Illustration Notes:* Though this figure's pose and physical features tend to remind viewers of the Christ, the distinctive expression and gesture is undeniably that of the disciple James (the son of Zebedee, one of the "sons of thunder" and one of Jesus' dearest friends), as portrayed in Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*.

## Commentary

Tradition tells us that the disciple James was beheaded in Jerusalem about fourteen years after the resurrection of Christ. (He may, in fact, have been the first martyred apostle). As he was led to his death by the man who had borne false witness against him, James expressed such joy and peace, his accuser converted to Christianity – and was also executed on the spot.

The wands above James' head suggest a delicate balance of goals and intentions. Unless we are careful to define our own goals and clarify our own intentions, we will never achieve "the peace that passes understanding". Knowing our mission allows us to face all challenges – and even death itself – with a composure that defies human wisdom.

## Exploration Questions

How certain am I of my own mission? My values? My goals?  
How clearly have I defined the terms of my success?  
What do I need to know in order to bring about my best possible future?

## Knave of Wands

*Encourages:* listening to opinions of

beginners or apprentices, thinking outside the box, being open to new ideas without regard for "what's been done".

*Cautions against:* taking rash action, embracing a solution without considering potential consequences, mindlessly taking advice from those too inexperienced to give it.

*Illustration Notes:* This fine young man appears originally in Da Vinci's sketch, "Man in Masquerade Dress with a Lance". In keeping with the theme of the suit, his lance has been altered, becoming a wand. Take time to appreciate the tension between the smoothness of the Knave's features (suggesting his inexperience) and the confidence of his stance!

## Commentary

How bold! How confident! How certain of himself! We've no doubt that the Knave could wield his Wand with the utmost dexterity. He is the embodiment of the young hero. The same beauty that draws us to him, though, reveals the Knave's least favorable characteristic. He has no battle scars; his confidence is, in fact, the confidence of ignorance.

Your situation may well call for "fresh eyes" – and good ideas often come from outsiders who have no experience to shape their vision. The Knave reminds you to be open to the suggestions of the least of the least; in doing so, though, don't neglect the sober, practical perspectives that only experience can provide.

## Exploration Questions

To what extent do I have the experience necessary to be effective?  
How experienced are those who are advising me?  
How can I avoid "confidence rooted in ignorance?"

## Knight of Wands

*Encourages:* pursuing adventures, clarifying ambiguity, making a living by assum-

ing risks and solving problems, throwing all your effort into achieving a goal.

**Cautions against:** positioning one's self as a mercenary, taking action without consideration for ethics or consequences, committing to a battle in which you have no personal investment.

**Illustration Notes:** This figure is a detail from Da Vinci's lost masterpiece, *The Battle of Anghiari*. While studies and sketches survive, most of what we know of the work is based on the copy by Peter Paul Rubens. This rider is one of several involved in a bewildering battle; the wand has, of course, been added for thematic reasons.

### Commentary

The Knight of Wands charges forward, dedicated to the achievement of his goal. Sincere passion drives him; he believes in what he seeks to do. Without that dedication, his progress is merely work. Unless his heart is in what he does, his performance in battle will be mechanical and, ultimately, ineffective.

The question you must ask is this: is your heart really in the work that lies ahead? If so, expect a measure of success. If not, it's time to consider why you've joined this battle in the first place. All too often, we find ourselves aligned with efforts for which we feel no real affinity. If this is the case, by all means, withdraw.

### Exploration Questions

Am I committed to the work at hand?  
To what extent are others equally committed to success?  
What motivates me in this situation?

### Queen of Wands

**Encourages:** mediation, seeking an objective opinion, good public relations, being aware of the motives of others who offer assistance or aid.

**Cautions against:** unbalanced opinions,

helping someone with an eye toward what you will gain in return, accepting advertising or PR material as unbiased truth.

**Illustration Notes:** This female figure is adapted from Da Vinci's *Lady with an Ermine*. The model is likely Cecilia Gallerani, a mistress of Ludovico Sforza. Da Vinci probably produced this portrait some two decades prior to the more widely-known Mona Lisa, and it remains one of his better-preserved masterpieces.

### Commentary

The Queen of Wands is bathed in the clear light of morning, gazing serenely out her window. The creature she holds is an ermine. According to legend, these tiny creatures would die if their coats became soiled; there were held, then, as symbols of purity and chastity. A long and tapered wand, the symbol of the Queen's authority, is within easy reach.

The Queen reminds you to pursue your goals with integrity. Reflect on your intentions, and communicate them with honesty and directness. Avoid indulging in (and be wary of) inflated claims, exaggerated benefits, or "paid praise". Before giving your support to others, take special measures to verify that their goals and intentions are pure.

### Exploration Questions

How can I lend my influence without sacrificing my integrity?  
What values am I unwilling to sacrifice in my quest for achievement?  
How can I better distinguish between flattery and fact?

### King of Wands

**Encourages:** the gentle exercise of power, maturity, honesty, conscientiousness, the implementation of your plans with warmth and affection.

**Cautions against:** ruling with an iron fist, blind ambition, granting too much power

to those who are too immature or too unbalanced to wield it responsibly.

*Illustration Notes:* The King of Wands is modeled on one of several of Da Vinci's character studies: in this case, "Portrait of a Man with a Hat". That said, the portrait also bears an uncanny resemblance to Francesco Sforza, father of the Duke of Milan, who was Da Vinci's patron during some of his most productive years – a man who embodied the attitudes assigned to this card.

### **Commentary**

The king's posture and expression communicate his character. He expects much. He condones little. He sees all. Instead of severity, though, he radiates warmth. (Indeed, in a deck with generally muted colors, his robe fairly glows!) Though seated, he is poised for action; in lieu of a scepter, he carries the proverbial "big stick".

This is a card about doing what must be done, but doing it with warmth and compassion. Ultimately, someone must take responsibility; our best possible futures occur when those we empower can temper their authority with sensitivity and humanity. A gentle spirit needn't be passive, though; to maintain order, a king must sometimes "apply the rod".

### **Exploration Questions**

To what extent am I capable of exercising both control and compassion?

How can I convince others to share my vision and accept my authority?

To what extent might the actions of past authority figures influence my current actions?

### **Ace of Chalices**

*Encourages:* growth, eating well, fostering a sense of well-being, tending to the healthy advancement of body and spirit, taking advantage of opportunities to be nurtured.

*Cautions against:* declining opportunities to be nurtured or cared for, rejecting opportunities for growth and advancement, ignoring physical and spiritual needs.

*Illustration Notes:* Art historians hotly debate the attributions of many paintings; this image is adapted from the *Litta Madonna*, which many refuse to attribute to Da Vinci. The subject was a popular one, and, while sketches suggest Da Vinci's own interest in this image, sharp eyes will note that this Christ child has few features in common with Da Vinci's other depictions.

### **Commentary**

Few symbols surpass in their tenderness the image of mother and child. In infancy, our emotional and physical needs are closely intertwined, and our primary caregivers – usually our mothers – attend to both. We begin life, then, protected and supported. Later, we may recall and long for such support.

This card suggests a need to devote yourself to the care of a project or person, or, perhaps, the need to accept care, guidance, and support from someone willing to support you. Either way, this is an opportunity for emotional and spiritual growth; take it. Refusing aid (or refusing to offer it when it is truly needed) will only retard your growth and stunt your spirit.

### **Exploration Questions**

Who needs my help today?

How can I encourage others to partake in a culture of growth and support?

How do I feel admitting my need for comfort and love?

### **Two of Chalices**

*Encourages:* passion, sexual energy, love making and love play, turning on the sexual charm, celebrating healthy sexual attitudes, making the most of your physical attractiveness.

**Cautions against:** wanton sexuality, unhealthy sexual indulgence, sex without recognition of its spiritual dimensions, sexual addiction.

**Illustration Notes:** In myth, Leda was seduced by Zeus (or Jupiter), who appeared to her in the form of a beautiful swan. While commentary on Da Vinci's *Leda and the Swan* survives, the work itself is lost to us. For insight into its competition, we must rely on early sketches and the numerous copies made by later artists (including Cesare da Sesto).

### **Commentary**

The sensual Leda is here approached by the symbolically masculine figure of the swan – a god in disguise, smitten with a mortal lover. The amorous pursuits of mythical gods are (literally) legendary... and, all too often, their intercourse gave rise to dangerous and powerful progeny. The lesson? Desire should be tempered with common sense.

Your situation is laced with desire, which may or may not be sexual in nature. Someone wants something (or someone wants to be wanted). There's no harm in healthy sex or in enhancing your own desirability. Beware, however, when desire begins to cloud judgment. Unwise indulgence, without an eye for the future, may foster unpleasant results.

### **Exploration Questions**

How comfortable am I with my own sexuality?

At what point does healthy interest give way to unhealthy lust?

How can I pursue my interests in healthy ways?

### **Three of Chalice**

**Encourages:** celebrating blessings, being thankful for what has been given or received, expressing thankfulness in prayer or through meditation, making humble requests.

**Cautions against:** thanklessness, refusing to acknowledge the role others have played in an achievement, boasting about your own achievements, empty or showy religion.

**Illustration Notes:** This card adapts a detail from Da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks*. The originals (two versions of the painting are known) place Mary in a womb-like cave, surrounded by phallic stalagmites and stalactites – elements which may conceal a subtle commentary on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

### **Commentary**

Prompted by his mother, the child in this image assumes an attitude of prayer. Expressing thanks is one way of celebrating the gifts we receive; thankfulness itself is a learned behavior. Our earliest experiences set the stage for our attitudes as adults. If we lived with parents who offered humble requests and sincere prayers, we tend to do so, as well.

What do you have to celebrate? All too often, we give ourselves exclusive credit for achievements supported or blessed by others. In your current situation, you'd do well to shine the spotlight on others. This card emphasizes the need for an humble heart and a constant mindset of gratitude for the daily gifts – large and small – the Universe sends our way.

### **Exploration Questions**

How can I show my gratitude for what I have?

Who has contributed to my current success?

To what extent am I willing to acknowledge the roles others play in my success?

### **Four of Chalice**

**Encourages:** abstinence, self-control, dieting, limiting what is eaten or done for religious or moral reasons, eschewing pleasures that aren't good for you.

*Cautions against:* gluttony, avarice, greed, addiction, knowing better but failing to act accordingly, risking health in order to pursue pleasure.

*Illustration Notes:* This figure is based on Andrew, one of the disciples from Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. His posture and gesture were originally intended to express shock or surprise. In keeping with the divinatory themes assigned to this card, here, Andrew appears to be refusing a meal or pushing away from the table, leaving food on his plate.

### **Commentary**

Andrew's name comes from the Greek word for manhood or valor, and he is the brother of Simon Peter. Traditionally, he is associated with piety and dedication to religious practice; he is also said, like Jesus before him, to have been crucified for his convictions (some say on an olive tree, while others say on a cross in the shape of an X).

The card urges us to have the courage of our convictions. If we are truly dedicated to our beliefs, we should be willing to embrace the freedoms and the limitations they bring. The words disciple and discipline have much in common; in your situation, someone would do well to exercise a little self-control.

### **Exploration Questions**

How might adopting some limits make me grow as a person?

How do I feel about giving up pleasure now for benefit later?

What could I give up now as a means of gaining something more precious later?

### **Five of Chalice**

*Encourages:* careful observation, meditation, analysis, striving to find the "naked truth", setting aside turbulent emotions and making an effort to be calm and objective.

*Cautions against:* wallowing in emotion

and self-pity, procrastination, paralysis from "over-analysis", glossing over the details, obsession.

*Illustration Notes:* This figure is based on one of many male nude studies in Da Vinci's sketchbooks. The chin in hand and crossed arms suggest a pensive pose. As adapted here, the figure appears to be reflecting on the mystery posed by the five glowing chalices that have materialized before him. The original is quite rough – hardly more than a line drawing.

### **Commentary**

Traditionally, the Five of Chalice has been associated with loss – based, mostly, on the Rider-Waite illustrations for this card. Here, though, the artists have chosen to focus on the need to look beyond turbulent and chaotic emotions (represented symbolically by the number five and the suit of cups, respectively) and strive for clarity.

Whatever troubles you now, you can deal with it more effectively by pausing to reflect on possible courses of action. This is not a time for plowing ahead; instead, this is a time to consider your options and remember what actions led you here in the first place. This meditation will calm you and refresh you, enhancing your chances for success.

### **Exploration Questions**

How can I resist overwhelming emotions and retain my sense of peace?

How might reflection be my best course of action?

To what extent am I able to shut out distraction and focus on my inner thoughts?

### **Six of Chalice**

*Encourages:* participation in games, indulgence in hobbies and other healthy pastimes, having fun for the sake of having fun.

*Cautions against:* allowing games to become reckless, having fun at the

expense of others, ignoring the rules in order to gain an advantage, cheating.

**Illustration Notes:** This image is a detail from Da Vinci's *Virgin and Child with St. Anne*. Both the Virgin and St. Anne have been removed, allowing us to focus on the figure of the child and the lamb with which he plays.

### Commentary

In traditional Tarot decks, the Six of Chalices is frequently associated with charity; here, the image chosen emphasizes shared joy. The child in the image embodies innocence – a theme further underlined by the presence of a gentle lamb. The moment is reminiscent of the playful relationship we may have with a beloved pet.

Joy is meant to be shared, but shared joy also calls on us to be aware of the responses and reactions of others. Those people capable of enjoying themselves despite the pain of others may soon find themselves without playmates; their associates would be wise to seek entertainment elsewhere. Don't allow competitiveness or ego to intrude on what should be, in the end, nothing more than a pleasant way to pass the time.

### Exploration Questions

How can I be more playful and less competitive?

What should be done to insure that everyone is having a good time?

How aware am I of the moods and responses of others?

### Seven of Chalices

**Encourages:** reviewing how something started and measuring progress to date, revelations, visions, revisions, imagining what could be... or could have been.

**Cautions against:** indulging in obsessive fantasies, hallucinations, allowing unrealistic expectations to poison perfectly good realities, distorted perceptions.

**Illustration Notes:** Many studies and sketches led to one of Da Vinci's busiest compositions, *The Adoration of the Magi*, an uncompleted work. This adaptation isolates a very small central image taken from a work packed with bewildering visual details: a riotous crowd, kneeling worshipers, rearing horses, and incomplete palaces.

### Commentary

The story of the Magi gave rise to more common tales of "three wise men" who, bearing gifts of gold, myrrh, and frankincense, sought out the Christ child. Having lived so long with prophecy, they now faced a startling reality: something they had only dreamed of had finally come about. The force of this realization drove them to their knees.

In your own situation, you are dealing with the difference between fantasy and reality. Something hoped for has failed to appear, or has materialized in a way that disappoints or surprises you. The answer to the question lies not in revelation, but in vision: rather than pursue a course of physical action, look back at the seed. What inspired your desire in the first place?

### Exploration Questions

When I started my current quest, what did I really want?

How certain am I that I'm seeing things clearly?

How might fantasy or imagination help me now? How might it hinder me?

### Eight of Chalices

**Encourages:** patience, pausing before taking action, savoring fleeting moments, waiting for events to unfold, giving up the illusion of personal control.

**Cautions against:** taking the reins of a situation and attempting to force a desired outcome, ignoring the need for contemplation, rushing to completion.

*Illustration Notes:* The subject of this card is clearly the Christ, as adapted from Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. Note Jesus' posture: he is exhausted, weary, aware of the betrayals and trials yet to come. Still, he pauses here for one last supper with his closest disciples – to share a final, quiet meal before giving himself over to the fulfillment of his destiny.

### **Commentary**

The Christ is a curious figure. Though positioned as King of Kings, he meekly accepts his destiny as a sacrificial lamb. His foreknowledge of events puzzled even his closest followers, none of whom ever seemed to grasp the awesome darkness of the coming crucifixion. Here, though obviously weary, Jesus fulfills his role at the Passover feast.

Some times call for decisive action. Others, however, are better met with reflection and consideration. The present, the now, is extremely fragile; you would be well served to savor the moment and appreciate what you have. Pushing forward will only disrupt the delicate energies that make today possible. Give up attempts to control, and simply be.

### **Exploration Questions**

How might a passive approach be beneficial now?

How do I feel about giving up control and allowing events to transpire on their own?

What role have I been assigned? How comfortable am I with fulfilling it?

### **Nine of Chalices**

*Encourages:* accepting advice, listening to the voice of experience, taking the advice of a father figure or respected elder, being open to guidance in general.

*Cautions against:* rejecting the wisdom of wise guides, haughtiness, disdain for the opinions of others, making light of the opinions and ideas of those around you.

*Illustration Notes:* Da Vinci's original sketch depicting these two men has faded greatly and is incomplete. The seated figure is clear; the hand and forward-leaning posture of his partner is more suggested than executed. In adapting the material, the artist has refined the source material, even adapting facial features from other profiles and character studies.

### **Commentary**

Traditionally, nine is the number of completion and totality; here, the number is paired with the symbolism of cups (emotions and spirituality). The illustration captures a moment when wise guidance is rejected. The younger man assumes his own emotional and spiritual experience provide him with a complete vision; as a result, he feels he no longer needs mature guidance.

This critical mistake is often repeated. Avoid it in your situation by seeking out wise counsel. Call on elders. Seek advice from someone who is being overlooked. Open yourself to evidence that contradicts what you've already decided to believe. True wisdom – indeed, truth itself – has nothing to fear from a wealth of perspectives... so why reject them out of hand?

### **Exploration Questions**

Whose advice am I rejecting? Why?

What is the news I don't want to hear?

What value might it hold?

How can I find an advisor I can trust?

### **Ten of Chalices**

*Encourages:* overcoming illness, healing, happiness, contentment, engaging in nurturing or healing activity, caring for others.

*Cautions against:* excessive or smothering attention, becoming addicted to recreation, sloth, hypochondria, an attitude of entitlement.

*Illustration Notes:* The Madonna and



Child have long been a popular motif for artists; Da Vinci, especially in his early years, shared the common fascination with these subjects. This image is based on the *Benois Madonna*, or *Madonna of the Flower*, an early work. This adaptation humanizes the figures by removing the halos seen in the original version.

### Commentary

The bond between mother and child gives rise to some of our happiest memories, especially when that bond was a happy, healthy one. The best mothers nurture their children, providing food and care; they also model tenderness and affection, setting expectations and shaping perceptions for years to come.

Moderated and expressed appropriately, this attention supports growth and, eventually, independence. Excessive mothering, however, disables us, transforming us into eternal children, perpetually unable to help ourselves. In your situation, bask in affection and provide adequate support; be sure, however, that you can also stand on your own two feet.

### Exploration Questions

How do I express concern and care?

What makes me feel nurtured and cared for?

To what extent is my concern expressed in healthy ways?

### Knave of Chalice

*Encourages:* youthful energy, confidence, spending time with old friends, bringing honesty and sincerity to bear on a situation, being yourself.

*Cautions against:* wearing “rose colored glasses”, allowing innocence to stray into naiveté, emotional inexperience, a susceptibility to deception or grand promises.

*Illustration Notes:* Studies of male nudes fill Da Vinci’s notebooks. The nude male

form was considered by many – Michelangelo, for example – to be the ultimate expression of beauty. The sketch that served as the inspiration for this pose is extremely rough; in adapting it for this deck, the artist fleshed out the figure, complete with the feminized masculine features typical of Da Vinci’s work.

### Commentary

The Knave of Chalice looks frail and hesitant, especially compared to the Knight in the same suit. His eyes are closed, as if he is listening to distant music, and his head is bowed, as if in prayer. He holds a cup aloft, and, with his opposite hand, points to something just beyond the boundaries of the card itself.

Knives embody youthful enthusiasm, but lack the experience to make sense of the energy of their suit. In the case of the Knave of Cups, we see emotional and spiritual sincerity coupled with the inability to channel these energies in productive ways. In your situation, someone could benefit from being a bit less dreamy and a bit more active. Is that someone you?

### Exploration Questions

How can I move from sensation to action?

How does my lack of experience figure into this situation?

What emotional or spiritual experience am I lacking? How can I acquire it?

### Knight of Chalice

*Encourages:* taking on the role of preacher or speaker, spreading ideas you’re passionate about, going to work for a cause you believe in, working for a non-profit organization.

*Cautions against:* brow-beating potential supporters or donors, becoming a fundamentalist or zealot, antagonizing others who do not share your perspective or priorities.

*Illustration Notes:* This is one of several

cards in the deck based on Da Vinci's studies of horses and riders. The Master's notebooks and sketchbooks are filled with charging and rearing horses, a popular military motif of the day. This image also recalls the studies Da Vinci completed for any of several formal monuments and sculptures, including one done for the Sforza family.

### **Commentary**

Knights charge into battle; the Knight of Cups does so based on his strong religious and emotional nature. His polarizing passions render the world in black and white terms: you're with him, or you're against him. He's the perfect person to have on hand when you're launching a new venture... just take care you don't get trampled as he rides out the door!

In your current situation, passions are driving action. There's nothing wrong with this – it's hard to do any work well, if you don't care about the work itself or what it stands for. The trick is to be motivated without becoming blinded. Riding roughshod over others hinders progress; be sure you care as much for your fellow man as you do the banner under which you march.

### **Exploration Questions**

What causes would I be willing to fight for?

How can I spread the word about my mission in a way that intrigues others?

At what point does passion give way to fanaticism?

### **Queen of Chalice**

*Encourages:* expressions of love and empathy, motherhood, expressing your maternal instincts, caring for others, nurturing friendships and relationships, sensitivity tempered with wisdom.

*Cautions against:* smothering others or being smothered with sentimental or controlling affection, being "tied up in apron strings", using love in manipulative ways.

*Illustration Notes:* A young woman adopts a classical pose. The placement of her hands recalls a sketch from Da Vinci's sketchbooks: a study of arms and hands, which may have inspired Escher's famous drawing of hands drawing themselves. Her skirts, too, have been modeled on any of several studies of draped cloth found in Da Vinci's notebooks.

### **Commentary**

The Queen of Chalice embodies supreme maternal love. Her energies may be felt in heart-felt friendships, nurturing relationships, and in any situation in which one person puts the interests of others above her own. She has the wisdom and insight to see beyond the surface; she understands our deepest needs, and responds to them with warmth and care.

Don't hesitate to express or receive the emotions assigned to the Queen of Chalice; at the same time, don't allow yourself to be controlled by them, either. Maturity requires that each of us be able to stand on our own two feet; if we spend a lifetime in Mother's arms, we never achieve our full potential. Remember: healthy nurturing always fosters eventual independence.

### **Exploration Questions**

How can I be a more nurturing person?

How can I express my maternal instincts?

To what extent are deep emotions creating or perpetuating my situation?

### **King of Chalice**

*Encourages:* lofty intellectualism, mature masculinity tempered by sensitivity, offering decisive help, making good decisions with an eye toward the best interests of all.

*Cautions against:* rash decisions, favoritism, failing to make critical decisions due to a fear of being judged or second-guessed, lacking faith in your own good sense.

*Illustration Notes:* The King of Chalices is based on Da Vinci's sketch of an elderly man with a flowing gray beard and distinctive hat. His facial expression and beard also recall Da Vinci's self-portrait. He sits atop a cubic throne stamped with a glyph taken from one of Da Vinci's notebook designs.

### Commentary

The King of Chalices stares down at his divinatory cup, trusting his intuition to lead him to wise decisions. For him, information provides a framework, but the heart – not the head – renders the final verdict. He is nurturing and caring – a provider, a mentor, a teacher, and a wise man. He has the hands of an inventor, and the soul of an artist.

The King of Chalices calls on you to apply your own sense of love and spirituality to the issue under examination. Trust your own best instincts; take action on behalf of everyone involved in the equation. This may mean that some don't get everything they asked for; it may also mean that others get more than they expected. Good judgment is the key; put yours to work.

### Exploration Questions

If I made this decision with my heart, what would the verdict be?  
How certain am I that my motives are pure?  
What is my intuition telling me in this situation?

### Ace of Pentacles

*Encourages:* the pursuit or acquisition of success, celebrating the abundance of goods, achieving a goal, expressing great joy, achieving balance.

*Cautions against:* over-reaching ambitions, evaluating success only in terms of physical or financial gain, obsessing on riches or pleasures of the flesh.

*Illustration Notes:* Da Vinci's *Vitruvian*

*Man* has here been set free from the squared circle (the figure concealed behind every illustration on every card). On the Ace of Pentacles, he appears with arms upraised, as though striving to transcend the limits of the image itself. Above him, etched upon a pentacle, is the more familiar version of the icon.

### Commentary

The glowing pentacle at the top of the card suggests the ascendancy of all things physical and financial – a time of opportunity and abundance, a fusion of events favorable to growth and acquisition. Embedded in the coin, the figure of the Vitruvian Man reminds us that a higher principle expresses itself in all things physical and sensory.

In the foreground, the Vitruvian Man himself greets and blesses us, inviting us into a world best explored by the senses. Naked, he revels in sensation: the view of the mountains, the cool air, the sunlit sky, the gurgle of the aqueduct in the distance. He is in the world, but not of it; he relishes sensory experience, but is not intoxicated by it.

### Exploration Questions

How comfortable am I in my own flesh?  
How concerned am I with all things physical and financial?  
What opportunities exist for enhancing my physical and financial well-being?

### Two of Pentacles

*Encourages:* clarity, untainted love, honest friendship, unconditional love and acceptance, engaging in love for the simple pleasure of doing so.

*Cautions against:* ambiguousness, lack of commitment, seeing friendship or love as a tool for personal gain, being a "gold digger", false affection.

*Illustration Notes:* In a threatening cavern (reminiscent of the setting of *The Virgin of*

*the Rocks*), an innocent child plays with young kittens. The child and the felines are adapted from sketches variously referred to as “The Madonna with Cat” or “The Madonna of the Cats”. The naked child embodies total innocence – and, with that innocence, the inability to do offer anything other than sincere love and affection.

### **Commentary**

The lone child, absorbed in play, has no agenda other than joy. Even young animals can sense this sincerity; handled by children, pets are often extraordinarily permissive and patient. There is no weighing of opportunity, no consideration of an agenda here. Instead, this moment epitomizes trust, friendship, and unconditional love.

The two Pentacles overhead are grouped to the far right of the image, suggesting an imbalance. Offering aid, assistance, love, and friendship brings light into the world... but the moment we think in terms of what these offers can do for us, we stray into dark territory indeed. Be sure your actions – and the actions of those around you – are sincere.

### **Exploration Questions**

How capable am I of unconditional love?  
How can I free myself from thinking in terms of profit and gain?  
What can I do to make sure my own motives are pure and unselfish?

### **Three of Pentacles**

*Encourages:* cooperative effort, unity, working collaboratively with others, contributing time or effort to a group project, working together to meet a common goal.

*Cautions against:* failing to fulfill commitments to others, rejecting offers of help and assistance, emphasizing one’s own contribution over the efforts of others.

*Illustration Notes:* These three characters and their work have been adapted from a

very small portion of a much larger work: Da Vinci’s *An Artillery Park*. In the original, dozens of laborers, like ants, work with scaffolding and levers to assemble a massive cannon. Curiously, the original figures are nude; here, they have been discreetly clothed.

### **Commentary**

The Pyramids are, perhaps, the most dramatic example of what tiny humans, working together, can achieve, despite the limitations of time and technology. These three workers employ levers and scaffolding to increase the power of their effort, but ultimately, their achievements are rooted in the fact that they are working together.

In the current situation, find common goals. If you have a goal in mind, find others who share it. Your success will be greatly multiplied when the effort is shared with like-minded people. Alternatively, there may be a need to transcend personal pride and accept offers of aid and assistance. To make faster progress, take advantage of whatever leverage presents itself.

### **Exploration Questions**

How well do I work with others?  
How can I find other people who think and feel as I do?  
How can I encourage cooperation instead of confrontation?

### **Four of Pentacles**

*Encourages:* making an objective assessment of your situation, emphasizing value, doing only the work you’re paid to do, an awareness of your bottom line.

*Cautions against:* greed, excessive love of money, focusing on the bottom line to the extent you harm yourself and others, emphasizing personal gains over the well-being of others.

*Illustration Notes:* This distinctive face could be based on any one of many of Da

Vinci's caricatures, with its most prominent features taken from a sketch labeled "Five Grotesque Heads". Note the expression – even his experience of joy is pinched and restricted – and how well it pairs with the figure's emaciated countenance and guarded posture.

### Commentary

Here, the energetic diagrams in the center of the Pentacles appear to be repressed and contained by the coins' outer rim. This state of affairs is in keeping with the spirit of the card, which calls for the sort of economic and physical discipline that, taken too far, could make financial and physical misers of us all.

The Pentacles here are not arranged in the familiar two-by-two pattern that suggests stability; instead, they are unbalanced and improperly distributed. This reflects the central figure's over-emphasis on profit... and the imbalance this creates in his spirit. In your situation, be sure to give credit where it's due. Be aware of the bottom line, but don't be a slave to it.

### Exploration Questions

How can your efforts benefit everyone involved?

What would be the appropriate emphasis on profit in your situation?

To what extent are you aware of the bottom line? How does this help or hinder you?

### Five of Pentacles

*Encourages:* being careful with money, knowing where funds originate and who supplies them, frugality, financial planning, an openness to assistance.

*Cautions against:* economic and financial difficulties yet to come, failure of plans, goals unachieved, wealth that fails to bring happiness, ill-gotten gains.

*Illustration Notes:* The theme of the card has led some to identify this figure as

Judas. As depicted in *The Last Supper*, however, Judas' profile fails to match that of this dark-headed, bearded man. He is, in fact, Da Vinci's *Masquerader in Guide of a Prisoner*, chosen for this card for his down-trodden expression and dark features.

### Commentary

An exhausted man travels through dry and blasted country, too weary to spy the river and the fresh water lake in the distance. His spirit is as impoverished as his empty purse; he stares down at the difficult road, no longer knowing or caring where it leads him. He extends his hand for alms, but not even gold coins could buy this man a way out of his bitterness.

The five pentacles in the upper right of this card are angled away from him, suggesting that his mood repels the aid that could relieve his situation. Financial poverty is threatening, but spiritual and emotional poverty is almost certainly lethal. Be frugal. Open yourself to assistance. Humble yourself. If crow is all that's offered you, eat some.

### Exploration Questions

To what extent am I a prisoner of my own mood?

How open am I to assistance? How open am I to asking for what I need?

What can I do to be a better steward of the money and affection I'm given?

### Six of Pentacles

*Encourages:* charitable action, offers of aid or assistance, offering material or spiritual help, asking for aid, giving freely, being thankful for blessings.

*Cautions against:* becoming hardened to the needs of others, looking away when real assistance is needed, engaging in charity in hopes of personal gain.

*Illustration Notes:* Da Vinci's sketch-books contain a number of character stud-

ies, often of individuals with bizarre or exaggerated features. The benefactor on this card resembles the central figure in a sketch labeled "Five Grotesque Heads"; he also shares features with a sketch of an older man crowned with laurel leaves.

### **Commentary**

Don't allow the severe expression of the figure on this card to fool you; this fellow is a model of how *not* to approach the business of charity. What's given to others should be freely given, or not given at all. Here, though, we see a man whose thoughts are weighed down by the Pentacles over head. His actions are good; his motives are not.

In order to have their most beneficial effect – on the recipients, and on us! – acts of charity must proceed from an open heart. Money, aid, or assistance of any kind must be freely given. The blessings we give (or receive) should make our spirits lighter; as you donate your time, effort, and funds (or as you request these from others), do so gratitude and thankfulness.

### **Exploration Questions**

What do I need? How can I show gratitude, once I receive it?

What am I in a position to give to others? How can I share my blessings more openly with other people?

### **Seven of Pentacles**

*Encourages:* efficiency, taking the path of least resistance, cooperation, calling on others for help or aid, clear communication with an eye toward avoiding misunderstanding, careful spending.

*Cautions against:* loss, limited productivity, missing assigned deadlines or performance targets, discovering that effort or money has been wasted or misdirected.

*Illustration Notes:* These figures have been adapted from a motion study. The source material – a series of tiny sketches

of laborers – is very rough; the figures themselves are little more than slashes and geometric shapes. Even these rudimentary forms, however, capture the various postures of effort – a testimony to Da Vinci's eye for essential details.

### **Commentary**

These two laborers appear to be working at odd with each other. They lean in opposite directions, making it easy to imagine that, even as one makes progress, the other interferes. This card may be a description of your situation. When everyone is working together, progress results. If different people are pursuing different goals, your only product will be chaos.

If directions haven't been given, get clarification. If you have directions, make sure they're being followed by everyone (including you!). If the effort has gone on for some time, stop now and review your progress toward your goal. You may find that someone or something has wandered off-track. Apply gentle correction and start moving forward again.

### **Exploration Questions**

What am I trying to accomplish? Is it worth the effort?

What's getting in the way of my goals?

How can I get everyone on the same page?

### **Eight of Pentacles**

*Encourages:* playfulness, happy confidence, a willingness to believe in the goodness of others, loyalty, a sincere belief in one's own ability to achieve one's goals.

*Cautions against:* believing anything and everything, excessive confidence and or self-confidence, pride, impractical approaches or assumptions.

*Illustration Notes:* The female figure on this card resembles Da Vinci's portrait of

Ginevra De Benci, one of his earliest surviving works. The lower portion of that painting has been lost; here, we see an adaptation of one of Da Vinci's sketches: "Woman and Unicorn". In this version, the unicorn has been replaced with a sketch of a canine.

### Commentary

Eight pentacles restrict the view of this card's central figure, who directs our attention to her faithful companion. He represents loyalty; she represents faith. Both qualities are admirable, but neither should be allowed to override our critical faculties. Blind loyalty, combined with blind faith, allows manipulation to thrive.

Maintain faith in yourself, and trust in those who have declared their loyalty to you. At the same time, remember that actions reveal intentions; someone who says one thing but does another is no longer worthy of your trust and support. If you work toward a balanced perspective, you can trust yourself without being overcome by your own ego... or paranoia.

### Exploration Questions

Whom do I really trust? Why do I trust them? What qualities engender trust?

Where do my loyalties lie? Are these people worthy of my loyalty?

At what point does having confidence in yourself give way to excessive egotism?

### Nine of Pentacles

*Encourages:* teaching, training, leading by example, imparting wisdom, listening to wise or experienced counsel, passing stories or values from one generation to the next.

*Cautions against:* drifting away from your core values, mindlessly following charismatic teachers or authority figures, perpetuating ignorance of cultural and social ideals.

*Illustration Notes:* This figure's gestures

and distinctive shaved head identify him as Simon, a disciple from Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. Referred to as Simon the Zealot (to prevent confusion with Simon Peter), this disciple's name suggests that he opposed the Roman occupation. Traditionally, he is thought to have been a guerilla fighter prior to his association with Christ.

### Commentary

Beneath an arrangement of Pentacles sits Simon the Zealot, a man with strong sentiments rooted in his nationalistic values. Here, he assumes the classic pose of a teacher or wise man. His gaze is clear, and his expression deliberate. This is a man who knows what he believes, and who shares his expertise with an air of total confidence.

His presence is appropriate on a card linked to the practice of teaching and training. What values and ideas inform your own opinions and actions? Be inspired by his fervor, but be wary, too – not all philosophies withstand close scrutiny, and not all teachers are worthy of their disciples. For insight into a guru's character, observe the fruit his teaching bears.

### Exploration Questions

What legacy will your own actions leave for those who would follow you?

To what extent are you in touch with your own cultural or ethnic values?

How might you benefit by seeking advice or training from an experienced teacher?

### Ten of Pentacles

*Encourages:* gratitude, a focus on the family, an emphasis on security and unity, reinforcing your foundations, a conservative economic policy.

*Cautions against:* spending money unwisely, neglecting security issues, neglecting family and friends, valuing money or physical pleasure over family obligations.

*Illustration Notes:* Like so many of Da Vinci's projects, the basilica in the foreground was conceived, but never constructed. The image is based on his initial sketches for the design, which call for an intriguing "squaring of the circle" through the integration of pleasing rounded forms and angular, more rigid architectural details.

### **Commentary**

How carefully ordered are the pentacles at the top of this card! Arranged in neat rows and columns, they become an expression of a mathematical formula – a visual representation of "ten-ness", of completion. There's a place for each pentacle, and every pentacle is in it; with a glance, we can verify that all is well.

The cathedral expresses the same idea through architecture. While its spires, stretching heavenward, echo the graceful forms of the trees, its sharp angles communicate stability and protection. We would do well to enter the chapel and honor the Divinity that provides us with the health, wealth, and family that forms the foundation of our lives.

### **Exploration Questions**

How long has it been since you expressed thanks for all you have?

What steps should you take to ensure the security of your money and family?

What serves as the foundation of your life? What can you do to protect it?

### **Knave of Pentacles**

*Encourages:* performing research, solving mysteries, considering evidence, investigating claims first-hand, concerning yourself with the details.

*Cautions against:* snap judgments, indiscretions, making decisions based on inadequate information, rejecting evidence that calls your conclusions into question.

*Illustration Notes:* This figure is based on a series of anatomical studies of the male head and torso. Da Vinci is frequently credited as the first artist to carry out extensive investigations into the anatomy of the human body. Da Vinci enhanced his larger understanding of physiology (and art) by paying strict attention to the tiniest of details.

### **Commentary**

The Knave of Pentacles focuses his clear gaze on the pentacle in his hand. Naked (and, therefore, unconcerned with the opinions of the world), he scrutinizes the pentacle, its design, and its deeper meanings. By observing the details, he hopes to extrapolate the larger picture; by mastering the small truths, he seeks to reveal the larger ones.

In your situation, someone would benefit from getting the "whole picture", first-hand, without the benefit of the commentary or opinion of others. The Knave's approach – direct observation – eliminates the possibility that information is being distorted or colored by the agendas of others. Trust your own perceptions and senses to reveal the truth today.

### **Exploration Questions**

What details am I overlooking?

How can I get past assumptions and agendas and see the truth for myself?

What information am I rejecting because it leads me to places I don't want to go?

### **Knight of Pentacles**

*Encourages:* hiring a consultant, working with a real estate agent or sales professional in any field, getting insurance, consulting a financial planner, seeing a doctor.

*Cautions against:* spending or saving money indiscriminately, wasting money by listening to bad or untrained advice, refusing to admit your own financial inexperience, avoiding the doctor.



*Illustration Notes:* The Knight of Pentacles is adapted from a sketch of a costumed character, presumably drawn as part of the plans for the Festival Paridiso, held by the Duke of Milan. The Pentacle, of course, has been added to the adapted image for thematic reasons. Note the use of background shading to imply movement from darkness (confusion) into light (clarity).

### **Commentary**

The Knight of Pentacles supports financial action. Spending? He's all for it. Saving? He's all for it. He thrives whenever money is in motion. But his interests aren't merely financial: he's also associated with all things physical. The sight of this Knight should prompt you to consider exercise, sexuality, and indulgences in luxury for luxury's sake.

Be careful how you integrate this energy into your life! Repressed, it makes us misers. Expressed, it drives us to physical and financial extremes. Directing the Knight's powerful flow in appropriate ways is always a challenge; you might do well to consult an expert – a coach, a guide, a specialist – who can give you more objective advice.

### **Exploration Questions**

Which is more appropriate now: spending or saving?

How does physical activity – or the lack of it – play a role in your situation?

Who are the experts in your area of concern? How can you contact one?

### **Queen of Pentacles**

*Encourages:* taking proper care of the money or talents you inherit, taking pride in your personal appearance and station in life, exploring your feelings about wealth, healthy sexuality.

*Cautions against:* hypochondria, worry-ing about finances without taking any

action to better them, entering into marriages or relationships purely with an eye toward potential profit.

*Illustration Notes:* This female figure is Da Vinci's Saint Anne (the mother of the Virgin Mary), from *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*. The downcast eyes and curious smile have prompted much speculation as to Da Vinci's intentions for this image. In the original, adult Mary sits awkwardly in St. Anne's lap, suspended there, it would seem, against the laws of physics.

### **Commentary**

How satisfied the Queen of Pentacles appears to be! She sits by the window, gazing down at the coin that represents her feelings toward health and wealth. She doesn't cling to it, but she recognizes its value, and so she keeps it close by. She's proud of it, but it doesn't rule her life. She's aware of it, but it doesn't spawn obsessions.

In your situation, you'd do well to adopt the strategies of the Queen. Celebrate your body. Enjoy the blessings that come your way. Embrace what you are and be proud of what you can be. At the same time, take care to keep these concerns in perspective; if they take center stage and become an end in themselves, benefits and advantages can become the seeds of your demise.

### **Exploration Questions**

How do I feel about my body? How does this limit my success? How might it contribute to it?

How have my attitudes toward financial matters contributed to this situation?

Am I more attentive to my body... or my pocket book? Why? What might this suggest?

### **King of Pentacles**

*Encourages:* making careful and calculated business decisions, working to become

financially skilled and stable, striving for fairness in business deals.

*Cautions against:* acting like a miser, thinking so much about profit that you cheat yourself and others, being stingy, using financial knowledge to trick or deceive others.

*Illustration Notes:* Adapted from a sketch labeled, "Face of a beardless man, facing left". Note the downcast eyes of the figure; here, the artist has made a pentacle (not in the original image) the subject of his stare. The pointing finger is a classical device Da Vinci frequently employed to add emotion and mystery to his work.

### Commentary

The King of Pentacles embodies financial and physical caution. Before decisions are made, he wants to know bottom-line impact. What will this cost? How much effort is involved? What will my profit be? How long before I earn that profit. If your projections are wrong, where do I go for my pound of flesh?

In your situation, it would be wise to practice both physical and fiscal responsibility. Get your ducks in a row. Have backups for your backups. Armed with good information, you'll succeed. Meanwhile, offer fair wages to your workers, and offer customers fair prices. Be conservative – but not constrained.

### Exploration Questions

How careful am I with money?

How focused on the bottom line do I need to be?

To what extent am I offering other people fair compensation?

### Ace of Swords

*Encourages:* charging ahead after making your initial decision, embracing victory, channeling energy into decisive action, slaying personal dragons, quick thinking.

*Cautions against:* forward motion for the sake of forward motion, snap decisions, failing to see a battle through to the end, wavering on commitments, procrastination.

*Illustration Notes:* This image is based upon the legend of St. George. Da Vinci explored the material in sketches. This adaptation resembles Raphael's *St. George and the Dragon*, which is said to have been inspired by Da Vinci's *The Battle of Anghiari*. The rearing horse and the rider's fluttering cape impart energy and motion to an otherwise static composition.

### Commentary

Overhead, a single sword points inexorably forward. Even though there are dragons along the way, the time for decisive action has come. This is not a time for the faint of heart! Pick your battle. Choose your weapon wisely. Strike at the very heart of what stands between you and success. Fortune favors the bold.

This is a time of opportunity – but nothing of value can be won without some effort, sacrifice, and, perhaps, even pain. To enhance your chances, practice your skills. Choose good assistants. Have faith in your cause. When the time comes to skewer the dragon or slay the sacred cow, you'll be ready for the fight.

### Exploration Questions

What fears must I overcome in order to be successful?

What weapons (tools) and steeds (helpers) are close at hand?

What decisive action would, if taken, put me in command of this situation?

### Two of Swords

*Encourages:* defending yourself against physical, verbal, or intellectual attacks, preparing for debate, understanding some differences can never be resolved.

*Cautions against:* allowing hatred to inspire unnecessary violence, allowing strong emotion to engender failures of logic and communication, being implacable or unreasonable.

*Illustration Notes:* Da Vinci had a fascination with fanciful and imaginative beasts; his sketchbooks are filled with them. The lion seen here assumes a classical pose; the dragon is from a sketchbook entry referred to as “*Drago che abbatte un leone*” (“A dragon attacks a lion”); the same beast appears on Trump XV, The Devil.

### Commentary

How they clash! The dragon, its wings flailing at the crackling air, lashes out with its talons and tail. His opponent, the King of Beasts, retaliates, bearing fangs and claws. The sound of their battle is great and terrible; the heat of their hatred for each other withers our spirits and exhausts our reserves.

The two swords in the upper right are a sign of the times. One points upward; the other points down. Two more diametrically opposed points of view could not be possible! Faced with such disagreement, we may find tempers flaring and emotions running amuck. When this happens (and it will!), will we lash out like beasts... or exercise our human capacity for reason?

### Exploration Questions

How do I respond when someone disagrees with me? Why?  
What is the basis for this disagreement?  
How well do I understand the other side?  
Am I being controlled by emotion... or reason?

### Three of Swords

*Encourages:* debate, discussion, comparing opinions, engaging in constructive criticism, reviewing results, evaluating effectiveness, objective study.

*Cautions against:* being overly critical, engaging in destructive criticism, striking down new ideas without offering alternatives, raising pointless objections.

*Illustration Notes:* From Da Vinci's *Last Supper* comes the figure of Matthew. Matthew (also called Levi) was a tax collector, and, according to tradition, would have been exceedingly wealthy. Yet, when Christ called him, Matthew followed immediately – characterizing him as someone who knew that spiritual riches held far more value than financial assets.

### Commentary

Matthew knew the value of money; his job involved assessing taxes and supplying them to Rome. Though hated and reviled by many, Matthew's unique perspective positioned him to make one of the most dramatic transitions chronicled in the Gospels: without hesitation, he left everything behind to follow Jesus.

Such resolution can only come from a mastery of the facts: a clear assessment of how and why one thing may be valued over another. The swords above Matthew's head suggest the logical “back and forth” (or debate) required to make sound value judgments. The card encourages us to make frank assessments and fair comparisons as part of the intellectual process.

### Exploration Questions

How open am I to opposing opinions?  
How can I make best use of them?  
What do I do with information that challenges my current world view?  
What value system do I use when evaluating new opportunities and information?

### Four of Swords

*Encourages:* comfort with unanswered questions, patience during research, waiting patiently for a plan to come to fruition, cultivating a mindset of peaceful receptivity.

*Cautions against:* worry, allowing puzzles or enigmas to move you toward madness, obsession, seeing the trees but not the forest.

*Illustration Notes:* While, to contemporary eyes, this figure may appear almost feminine, this personage is, in fact, adapted from Da Vinci's *St. John the Baptist*. The same features are common to portraits of Bacchus, and also to an infamous sketch of a sexually aroused angel, one of a series of pornographic sketches ascribed to Da Vinci.

### **Commentary**

In the Gospels, John the Baptist plays the role of herald. As he proclaims the pending arrival of the Christ, his audience must accept his word as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen". John encouraged his listeners to weigh his presentation against prophecy, and draw their own conclusions about the legitimacy of his claims.

In order to weigh evidence and draw profitable conclusions, you must possess a clear and open mind. Objectivity requires us to set aside our own dearly held conclusions and consider alternatives; it's a trick very few have mastered. Rather than let your head be filled with doubt and debate, why not calm your thoughts and open yourself to new evidence?

### **Exploration Questions**

How open am I to information that conflicts with my beliefs?

How can I cultivate receptiveness?

What can I do to make myself more objective in this situation?

### **Five of Swords**

*Encourages:* careful selection of friends and associates, having the courage of your convictions, being honest despite the consequences, exposing fraud and hypocrisy.

*Cautions against:* betrayals, renouncing

your faith, false friends, flattery, entering into or perpetuating conspiracies, failing to be a faithful friend, gossip.

*Illustration Notes:* Who else but Judas, as seen in Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, could appear on a card associated with false sentiments and betrayals? Here, he reaches for the bread, or "sop", Jesus said would indicate the traitor in the disciples' midst. He is the embodiment of twisted ethics: a man who valued thirty pieces of silver over the life of the Son of God.

### **Commentary**

The name Judas will forever be associated with traitorous intent. Above his head, five swords further illustrate the meaning of this card. The interaction of two against three is inherently unbalanced; at some point, the inequalities will cause the entire arrangement to come tumbling down. Why would we expect imbalanced relationships to fare differently?

This card is concerned with the variance between our innermost thoughts and our outermost actions. Anyone can maintain a façade for a while – but eventually a person's core values will motivate actions that reveal true character. Someone in this situation is saying one thing and thinking another. Be sure that person isn't you.

### **Exploration Questions**

To what extent am I conducting myself with integrity and honesty?

What hidden motivations or intentions could be hindering my progress?

How can I identify a traitor or backstabber?

### **Six of Swords**

*Encourages:* taking chances, being aware of risks and dangers, braving the unknown, embracing uncertainty, making dangerous but necessary choices.

*Cautions against:* taking unnecessary risks, proceeding blindly, taking action

without heed for outcome, taking action for action's sake, engaging in micromanagement.

*Illustration Notes:* In this detail from a sketch usually referred to as *Allegory of a Wolf and Eagle*, one Da Vinci's fantastic beasts – a wolf – can be seen steering a remarkable boat toward the shore. Note, too, how the sail recalls the bat-wing shape associated with a number of the flying machines Da Vinci envisioned.

### **Commentary**

The Six of Swords depicts the moment when stability of thought (the four swords seen overhead) interacts with duality of thought (the two swords interlaced with the four). The resulting collaboration sets the stage for forward motion – but movement for the sake of movement may not carry us closer to our goals. It's best to have a plan in place.

Here, a lonesome wolf travels troubled seas in a tiny, cleverly designed craft. He steers it with wheel whose shape recalls a compass, the symbol of certain direction. Note, too, the ship's remarkable mast: a reminder that the mental machinery giving rise to direction is also the key to life and growth.

### **Exploration Questions**

How well have I mapped out where I'm going?

What factors have influenced my current direction?

How well do I collaborate with others? What information am I rejecting – and why?

### **Seven of Swords**

*Encourages:* Considering humane ways to achieve military and personal goals, employing a "secret weapon" to win a conflict, deliberating the ultimate cost of drastic action.

*Cautions against:* allowing your talents to

be deployed in harmful ways, the human tendency to justify the use of force and torture to speed progress, inflicting suffering on others.

*Illustration Notes:* The "storming wagon" or battle card seen here is also depicted on Trump XV, The Devil. Of all of Da Vinci's designs, this one is perhaps the most disturbing, as it reveals the darker side of his innovative mind. Both the wagon and the weaponized chariot are efficient killing machines, designed to slice away the arms and legs of opposing soldiers.

### **Commentary**

Beneath a lattice of seven swords (five, the number of chaos and instability, coupled with two, the number of debate and duality), we see two elaborate inventions. Standing alone, they remain inert; directed by human intention, they become cruel and efficient killing machines. They provide an advantage in battle... but at what cost?

Everyone has an agenda... but some are more willing than others to deploy drastic measures to get their way. This card urges us to think of long-term consequences before we "plow ahead" without regard for the welfare of others. Once we begin justifying atrocities, the machinery of darkness gains momentum. Is progress at any price an option you can afford to explore?

### **Exploration Questions**

How will my decisions and actions impact others?

How can I achieve my goals with my integrity and humanity intact?

How willing am I to oppose the use of unnecessary or inhumane force?

### **Eight of Swords**

*Encourages:* just punishment, accepting fines or consequences when you've been in the wrong, making atonement for your

part in wrongdoing, looking forward instead of looking back.

*Cautions against:* meting out punishment that does not fit the crime, coming down too hard on others or yourself, allowing panic to blind you to options for action.

*Illustration Notes:* Da Vinci's sketch of Saint Sebastian served as source material for this image. Sebastian, secretly a Christian, used his position in the Roman military to gain access to and comfort persecuted believers. Diocletian discovered his secret and ordered Sebastian's execution; Sebastian survived, confronted Diocletian again, and was beaten to death.

### Commentary

Trapped! At least, you may feel that way at first. Your hands are tied. Your back's against a wall (or, in this case, a tree). You – or perhaps your deeds, or the deeds of another – have been exposed. Is there an alternative to this agony? With one foot put bravely forward, the figure on this card is, at least, trying to escape.

In your situation, you have decisions to make. If you've done something wrong, you may be best served, in the long run, to take what's coming to you. If you're innocent, it's time to produce evidence to that effect. If you're in a mess that's not of your own making, resist the urge to run away willy-nilly; be alert, and remember your closest exit may be behind you.

### Exploration Questions

What did I do wrong? What were the consequences?

How can I make amends toward someone I've wronged?

How have I been wronged? Am I seeking true justice, or petty revenge?

### Nine of Swords

*Encourages:* confessions, admissions of guilt, declarations of your innermost thoughts and feelings, expressing yourself

without fear of judgment or consequences.

*Cautions against:* using information in hopes of manipulating others, saying one thing while thinking another, hiding fault, being "two-faced" or insincere.

*Illustration Notes:* Here, adapted from *The Last Supper*, we find Philip, one of Christ's twelve disciples. He stands to the left of an elaborate arrangement of nine swords. Note how the swords are grouped: four (the number of stability) interlaced with three (the number of expression) above two (the number of duality).

### Commentary

Of all those who answered Jesus' initial call to discipleship, Philip has a reputation for speaking his mind clearly. In the Gospels, he is called on again and again for frank assessments, and he did not refrain from asking Jesus outright to "see the Father". His faith was stable, his expressions forthright. Lesser men might have hidden their doubts and questions.

Philip encourages us to act as he did: speaking our questions aloud, revealing our innermost selves, and asking plainly for the information and evidence we need. Further, he warns us to avoid the dishonesty that plagues most human conversation. When this card appears in a reading, it's time to speak frankly... and insist that others do the same.

### Exploration Questions

Why do I hesitate to say what I mean?

How can I express myself without shutting others out?

Who in my situation is saying one thing, but thinking or doing another?

### Ten of Swords

*Encourages:* claiming or acknowledging victory, celebrating the achievement of a difficult objective, travel into unknown

territory (literal or psychological), making a final decision.

*Cautions against:* refusing to see the storm clouds on the horizon, failing to prepare for potential disaster, believing that everything will always be peaceful or that all choices will be obvious.

*Illustration Notes:* This landscape recalls the distinctive geography and visual details of a chalk sketch referred to as *Storm over a Landscape*. Note how the brooding clouds, their potential force emphasized by the sloping walls of the mountains, loom over the peaceful city. The violence and danger of the storm is – just barely – held at bay.

### Commentary

In many occult decks, this card features a poor soul who has become, for whatever reasons, the pincushion of fate. Ten swords impale him; he lies facedown in a pool of his own blood. The reason for his defeat is unclear, and much debate surrounds whether the gleam on the horizon is a sunrise or a sunset.

Here, eight interlocked swords indicate the need for a final decision, yet two free-standing swords suggest that debate is still the order of the day. While we stand here pointing fingers and projecting blame, the storm draws ever closer. Life is moving on; why haven't you? The time has come to cast a vote, be done with this dilemma, and attend to the clouds on the horizon.

### Exploration Questions

How can I make a decision and be done with this situation?

How can I shift attention from unimportant details to the larger picture?

At what point will my question be rendered moot by changing events?

### Knave of Swords

*Encourages:* reception of good news, receiving of a messenger, being alert,

watching for omens and coincidences, calmly receiving unexpected information of any kind.

*Cautions against:* “killing the messenger”, rejecting news that doesn't conform to expectations, ignoring clear signs of impending change, failing to analyze available information.

*Illustration Notes:* This finely muscled figure's distinctive stance – posture straight, weapon in hand, legs apart to enhance his balance – is clearly adapted from a charcoal or black chalk sketch of Hercules. In keeping with the theme of the suit, a sword has been placed in his hands; it does not appear in the original image.

### Commentary

The battle-ready Knave of Swords is the picture of stability... or is he? His undeniable beauty and fair form may draw the eye, and his powerful sword may be the best available, but his armor, it seems, leaves something to be desired. The Knave, however, ignores this unpleasant bit of information; acknowledging a lack of armor would intrude on his fantasy of readiness.

In your situation, you should strive to be open to information, especially any message that may conflict with your most dearly held beliefs. Look beyond email, the web, and the news; watch the skies, be attuned to signs in the natural world, and listen to your feelings, too. The universe is sending you a signal; are you open to the news it brings?

### Exploration Questions

What news do I want to hear? What news would I prefer to avoid?

What are the signs that I'm ready for change? What are the signs that I'm not ready?

How might the events of the last few days be seen as a coded message from the universe?

## **Knight of Swords**

*Encourages:* volunteering as a soldier or worker, agreeing to perform the work assigned by others, striving to be diligent and honest, practicing prudence.

*Cautions against:* blind allegiance, volunteering and then railing against those who have authority over you, generating dissent, spreading gossip, rebelling against authority.

*Illustration Notes:* The “rearing horse and rider” motif occurs hundreds of times in Da Vinci’s notebooks. The striking muscularity of the human and equine forms was a source of fascination for him; he filled page after page with images like these. Here, the rider is given a sword not seen in the original sketch, usually referred to as *Nude on Horseback*.

### **Commentary**

The Knight of Swords applies his activity to matters of logic and authority. Who’s in charge? What’s the goal? Every move forward must be compared against a clear definition of the desired outcome. Without this blueprint for success, the Knight of Swords feels lost and misdirected; in these situations, he is likely to grumble or even encourage revolt.

In your situation, the Knight of Swords can be a powerful role model and ally. It’s good to know where you’re going and why! Still, a tolerance for ambiguity is a hallmark of maturity. Get whatever information is available, align yourself with the best possible leader, and get to work. If others around you are griping and complaining, ignore them; focus on your goal.

### **Exploration Questions**

Who’s in charge of the situation? How do you know?  
What, exactly, are the terms of success?  
Who controls their definition?  
What would a “winning” outcome be for you? Why?

## **Queen of Swords**

*Encourages:* keeping a stiff upper lip, remaining calm and focused through difficult times, handling loss in positive ways, making hard choices with grace and dignity.

*Cautions against:* pending divorce or separation, loss or defection of a partner, frigidity, repressing emotion, emphasizing efficiency over feelings.

*Illustration Notes:* The distinctive hairstyle, headdress, and necklace worn by this model identify her as *La Belle Ferronière*. Take a moment to appreciate the tension between the innocence of the large eyes and the rigid fierceness suggested by her tight jaw and thin slash of a mouth. Note, too, how the formality of the model’s pose is at odds with her soft, rounded features.

### **Commentary**

The Queen of Swords combines the reflective qualities of a Queen with the decisive logic of the suit of Swords. She is a strong woman, possessed of a penetrating vision. She is not fooled by illusions or seduced by false promises. Her experience gives her wisdom beyond her years; unless she exercises great care, she can easily become jaded or pessimistic.

The Queen of Swords encourages you to make fair, unbiased decisions. She recommends logic as a strategy, but also encourages you to draw upon your own experiences as a way of evaluating future action. Her calculating gaze should remind you to use your head... but, in doing so, don’t forget that you have a heart, as well.

### **Exploration Questions**

How well do I balance logic and emotion?  
When making decisions, do I use my head or my heart?  
How can I be both objective... and compassionate?



## King of Swords

**Encourages:** exploring or favoring political solutions, providing clear direction, seeking decisive verdicts, diplomacy in all its forms, certainty tempered with tact.

**Cautions against:** red tape, bureaucracy, harsh judgment, using superior knowledge to manipulate others, fundamentalism, dogmatism.

**Illustration Notes:** This image borrows a detail from Da Vinci's *Antique Warrior* – specifically the head of said warrior. Adapted here as the King of Swords, the warrior is given a weighty suit of armor and a long and powerful sword. These are symbolic of his authority, but they also suggest a tendency toward immobility... and, therefore, the potential for bias.

### Commentary

Despite his fanciful headgear, this King strikes a stiff, formal pose. He stares for-

ward, obsessed with his sword, the symbol of his sovereign right: his word is law. This arrangement certainly greases the wheels of the machinery of state... but it also opens the door to men of low character who become puppets or dictators.

An opportunity exists – an invitation for clear thinking and justice. Will you model your actions on those of deceitful or honorable kings? Consider what blades are needed to cut through red tape and take appropriate action. Be decisive... but never lose sight of the people who grant you your authority, or you may wake up to find yourself a king without a country.

### Exploration Questions

How can I avoid abuses of my power? What are the “rules” in this situation? Who controls them? Who transcends them?

How does dogmatism or rigid thinking play a role in my situation?



**About the Author.**

**Mark McElroy's work as a Tarot writer,  
deck designer, and teacher empowers people to read  
the cards for themselves. His books apply the Tarot's  
wisdom to work (Putting the Tarot to Work),  
romance (Taking the Tarot to Heart),  
and everyday life (What's in the Cards for You?).  
His Bright Idea Deck is a powerful brainstorming tool,  
disguised as a deck of cards.**



Since it first appeared in 1992, the Da Vinci Tarot has been a source of insight and intrigue. Which of the Master's works inspired the illustrations?

What are the true identities of the mysterious figures on each card?

Their sidelong glances, odd gestures, and enigmatic smiles suggest a coded message ... but what might that message be?

The Da Vinci Tarot Companion answers these questions ... and many more.

As you read, you'll also discover:

- the facts about Leonardo Da Vinci's involvement with the powerful House of Sforza -- the family that commissioned one of the world's first and most beautiful Tarot decks.
- the true origins of the Tarot, including insights into whether the deck conceals doctrines long suppressed by the Church.
- clear, easy-to-follow instructions for using the deck as a tool for meditation, inspiration, and divination.
- expanded divinatory meanings for each card in the deck, including keywords, the stories behind the cards, and exploration questions that help you apply the card to your situation.



The Da Vinci Code Companion is your comprehensive guide to the beautiful Da Vinci Tarot, illuminating its depths and revealing its secrets for the very first time.

